

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Wednesday, March 8

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, creamy noodles, California blend vegetables, carrot bars, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Eggs and breakfast potatoes.

School Lunch: Sloppy joes, sweet potatoes fries.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

ACT Practice Test at GHS, 8:30 a.m. (Grades 11 and 12 (optional))

St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lent Service, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.; Soup Supper, 6 p.m. (Sarah Circle serves), worship, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.



Thursday, March 9

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.

School Lunch: Chicken sandwich, chips.

Girls Basketball State Tournament in Watertown

Friday, March 10

Senior Menu: Potato soup, chicken salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, cinnamon apple sauce.

School Breakfast: Biscuits and Jelly.

School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, green beans.

Girls Basketball State Tournament in Watertown

Saturday, March 11

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Girls Basketball State Tournament in Watertown

Sunday, March 12

DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME BEGINS

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

Rate increases, summer plans approved by Groton City Council

by Elizabeth Varin

Electric rates and swimming costs are set to go up for the city of Groton.

The City Council approved an electrical rate increase and a swimming pool charges at its regular meeting Tuesday, March 7.

Residential rates are set to increase April 1, according to the ordinance the council approved with a unanimous vote. While base bill totals and minimum charges remained the same for each schedule of electric service, the rate per kilowatt hour increased.

Load management participating electric residential rates will increase from \$0.097 per kilowatt hour to \$0.107 per kilowatt hour. Interruptible power, including dual heat and heat storage units, will increase from \$0.05 per kilowatt hour to \$0.055 per kilowatt hour.

The rate increases include a half-cent per kilowatt hour or a one-cent per kilowatt hour increase.

With only one question from the public about the minimum charges, the council approved the increase.

The council also approved an increase in some swimming-related charges for this summer.

Swimming pool co-managers Kami Lipp and Tricia Keith asked the council to increase swimming lesson and private lesson charges in order to pay the swimming instructors more and incentivize them to work in Groton.

Without some incentives like this "tip" for the swim instructors, it will become harder to get enough lifeguards to want to work at the swimming pool in Groton, Keith said.

This is a services on top of their job of lifeguarding, Lipp added.

The council approved increasing swim lesson rates from \$30 per two-week session to \$50 per session. Private lesson rates will also increase from \$75 for five 30-minute lessons to \$125 for those five lessons.

Private swim lessons can cost between \$120 and \$200, so even with the increase, the city will be below other prices, Keith said.

"If my kids need private lessons, I don't think it's out of the question," said Councilwoman Karyn Babcock.

Councilman Brian Bahr added that while he hates to increase prices like this, it seems everything is increasing, like water rates and wages.

Water aerobic and lap swim rates will also increase from \$35 for the summer to \$50 for the summer. A combined water aerobic and lap swim pass will now cost \$75 for the summer.

While the snow started to fall in town, the council continued discussion of summer items, including setting salaries for summer employees and, after about an hour of executive session, hiring more than 30 people for swimming pool, baseball and public works positions.

Groton Baseball/Softball Foundation Treasurer Doug Hamilton gave the council an update on plans to build a new concession stand at the baseball complex.

The facility would include larger bathrooms, a new drinking fountain/water bottle filling station, a utility room and a concession stand area with built-in coolers, Hamilton said. While initial cost estimates were \$150,000 to \$160,000, it may come in closer to \$200,000.

Completed plans for the building may be available at the end of the month, Hamilton said. The foundation is working with the city to apply for a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant from the federal Department of the Interior.

Before a grant application can be submitted, there needs to be a firm price on the building, Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich said. The grant application is due April 28.

Doug Hamilton added his ideal construction start date would be as soon as the last game is done this summer. The foundation hopes to have the new concession stand before the city hosts the state junior legion tournament in 2024.

The council continued discussion about plans for the old building at the baseball field, including looking into costs of moving the old concession stand to a vacant lot owned by the city. It could then be used by a non-profit, like the new Common Cents Thrift Store or The Pantry, said Mayor Scott Hanlon.

The council also discussed the city's soda contract. Currently the city has a contract with Coca-Cola

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Bottling Company High Country to provide bottled drinks to the baseball field concession stand and the swimming pool.

Council members expressed concerns about the cost of drinks as compared to buying in bulk from a retail store.

The contract, signed in April 2020, requires the city to buy at least 100 more cases before it can renegotiate or terminate the agreement, said City Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich.

"We can't back out of it right now anyway," he said.

After discussing the contract with the Coca-Cola sales representative, Heinrich said the city can take advantage of a few more perks that are not currently being utilized.

There are provisions in the contract with Coca-Cola Bottling Company High Country wherein the supplier will provide \$250 in marketing and/or media value per year. What that means, Heinrich said, is the bottling company may provide funding for banners or other signage at the baseball fields during big tournament event. The bottling company will also provide five-gallon PowerAde jugs with powdered PowerAde for the city during the summer.

There are also some additional benefits of utilizing a supplier, like the bottling company provides the coolers at the baseball field concession stand and the swimming pool. They also maintain them if there are any repairs that are needed.

Coca-Cola Bottling Company High Country also provides a rebate of \$4 per 24-bottle case sold, Heinrich said. In 2022, that totaled \$802 back to the city.

Councilwoman Karyn Babcock asked the council whether it would be worth it to just buy those 100 cases to get out of the contract. Retail store have lower prices per case and the option of buying generic product for a bigger discount.

However, she added, that would add issues with getting the beverages to Groton and purchasing coolers for the baseball field and swimming pool.

Councilman Brian Bahr proposed the city wait it out for another year and, once the contract is fulfilled, the city can get quotes for a contract going forward.

The City Council's next meeting, originally scheduled for March 21, will be moved to March 22 so city staff and council members can attend the South Dakota Municipal League District 6 Annual Meeting in Hecla.

Council members were invited to meet with staff from the South Dakota Governor's Office of Economic Development who will be visiting the city March 24. Only three council members and the mayor can attend the meeting. If more council members attend, the City Council will have to hold a special meeting as there would be a quorum.

The council approved declaring a table dolly, three wooden tables, four chair dollies and a wood and rubber couch as surplus. City staff will work to sell the items.

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Sioux Valley fends off Groton Area in the SoDak16

It was the final game for the four seniors - Tate and Cade Larson, Cole Simon and Tyson Parrow, as Sioux Valley defeated Groton Area in the SoDak 16 game played Tuesday at the Watertown Civic Center, 73-56. Coach Brian Dolan had all four seniors playing in the closing part of the game.

The Tigers put up a good battle against the 20-2 Cossacks. Sioux Valley scored the first seven points of the game, but Groton came back took a 15-14 lead with 2:21 left in the first quarter. Sioux Valley reclaimed the lead at 16-15 and Groton Area tied the game at 18 and 20 before the Cossacks took a 22-20 lead after the first quarter. Groton shot 67 percent in the first quarter and Sioux Valley shot 77 percent.

Sioux Valley's height did its job on the offensive boards. Sioux Valley opened up a 12-point lead late in the second quarter, but Groton closed to within eight at halftime, 43-35. Groton Area made 45 percent of its field goals and Sioux Valley made 67 percent in the second quarter.

The Tigers went stone cold in the third quarter, making just 14 percent of its shots while Sioux Valley maintained its 60 percent shooting. Even with that as Sioux Valley opened up a 16 points lead, 51-35, Groton Area battled back to within eight and trailed by 12 at the end of the third quarter, 55-43. Sioux Valley would go on to win and advance to the State A Basketball Tournament.

Cole Simon led the Tigers with 18 points, four rebounds, three assists and three steals. Jacob Zak had 15 points, four rebounds, one assist and four steals. Lane Tietz had 12 points, three rebounds, three assists and two steals. Ryder Johnson had eight points, three rebounds and three assists. Taylor Diegel had one point, one rebound and one assist. Cade Larson and Logan Ringgenberg each had one rebound.

Groton Area made nine of 24 in two-pointers for 38 percent, 10 of 30 three-pointers for 33 percent (Zak 3, Simon 3, Tietz 2, Johnson 2), the Tigers made eight of 13 free throws for 62 percent, had 19 rebounds, eight turnovers, 14 assists, nine steals and 11 team fouls.

Oliver Vincent and Alex Squires led the Cossacks with 21 points apiece while Hudson Ruesink had 19, Maxwell Engebretson five, Boden Schiller four and Maverick Nelson three. Sioux Valley made 29 of 46 field goals for 63 percent 10 of 11 free throws for 91 percent, had 11 turnovers and 15 team fouls.

Groton Area finishes its season with a 16-6 record. Sioux Valley goes to 21-2.

- Paul Kosel

The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

Fed's monetary policy before the House Financial Services Committee from 10 a.m. ET.

- Voters in Oklahoma have overwhelmingly shot down the legalization of marijuana for recreational use in a referendum five years after the state legalized the drug for medical purposes.

- Elon Musk has admitted that Twitter has faced a "very difficult four months" since he purchased the platform, citing a "massive decline in advertising" and other unspecified "political" reasons.

- A Texas judge has withdrawn the April 5 execution date for Andre Thomas, a death row inmate whose attorneys say is not competent to be executed.

- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, a new intelligence report suggests that an unidentified pro-Ukrainian group was responsible for last year's attacks on the Nord Stream natural gas pipeline, with no evidence that the Ukrainian government was involved in the incident.

- Fox News host Tucker Carlson blasted Republicans who disagreed with his Jan. 6 narrative, saying they decided to "degrade themselves" with obvious "lies." Read about new exhibits unsealed in a lawsuit against Fox News below.

- President Joe Biden said his budget will reduce the national deficit by \$2 trillion over the next 10 years by increasing taxes on the wealthy. The Bulletin will cover the budget in detail in tomorrow's edition.

- Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell told lawmakers the bank would likely raise interest rates higher than "previously anticipated" on strong economic data. He will discuss

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Conde National League

March 6 Team Standings: Tigers 29, Pirates 24, Cubs 23, Braves 21, Mets 18, Giants 17

Men's High Games:

Butch Farmen 235, 207, 204; Ryan Bethke 222; Chad Furney 194

Men's High Series:

Butch Farmen 646, Ryan Bethke 545, Chad Furney 496

Women's High Games:

Sam Bahr 184, Nancy Radke 177, Vickie Kramp 167

Women's High Series:

Nancy Radke 464, Vickie Kramp 444, Sam Bahr 437

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- Heavy-duty cast aluminum auger gear box w/ 5-year limited warranty

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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Lawmakers focus on general sales tax reduction, defeating other tax cuts

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MARCH 7, 2023 3:51 PM

PIERRE — Gov. Kristi Noem's grocery tax repeal bill lived for only 17 hours after it was revived Monday. The House rejected the bill Tuesday morning. An hour later, legislative leaders from the House and Senate killed the property tax rebate program the Senate revived last week, with a suggestion to take a closer look at property tax reform in the future.

"I think there are some issues that still need to be resolved," said House Majority Whip Kirk Chaffee, R-Whitewood. "I'm not sure this bill is the right one to get it done, but I think the issue is real."

Now the Legislature is left with two rival tax cut bills that would each reduce the overall state sales tax rate. There are only three days left in the legislation session – Wednesday and Thursday, and March 27, when lawmakers are scheduled to return and consider any vetoes from Noem.

The governor did not immediately issue any public statements about the rejection of her grocery tax repeal. She previously threatened to withhold her support for the state budget if the grocery tax repeal didn't pass, but avoided using the word "veto."

One of the two remaining tax relief bills, Senate-approved House Bill 1137, would reduce the 4.5% state sales tax to 4.3%, shaving about \$69 million from annual tax collections, with a sunset clause to end the tax cut in two years. It was a compromise worked out with senators who are worried that the state's surging tax revenues and budget surpluses could subside in the next few years.

The other bill is House-approved Senate Bill 104. It would reduce the state sales tax from 4.5% to 4.2%, which would have an impact of about \$104 million, without a sunset clause.

Leaders have appointed a conference committee on HB 1137 to work through their differences on the two bills. The appointed legislators will meet at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday.

Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree, R-Madison, said the goal is adopting a proposal that's "best for everybody" and still allows the state to fund the "Big Three": education, state employees and Medicaid providers.

"There were three options out there. Two of them are gone and now we're down to one. This is just the way this works," Crabtree said. "At the same time you have those discussions, you have discussions about what we're going to do with the Big Three and a couple of the other priorities that are out there, and it's easily coming together."

House Majority Leader Will Mortenson, R-Pierre, suggested the House would consider a sunset clause in exchange for a larger tax cut.

"The House plans on being here as I

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.

House fails to override Noem's veto of optional hotel tax increase

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 7, 2023 3:37 PM

The state House of Representatives failed on Tuesday to override Gov. Kristi Noem's veto of a bill that would allow hotels and motels in "business improvement districts," or BIDs, to raise a per-room tax.

Supporters of the bill fell six votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to override the veto. The vote was 41-29, which was four votes fewer than the bill received when the House passed it.

Rep. Mary Fitzgerald, R-Spearfish, spoke against the bill.

"No matter how you slice this, no matter what kind of a pretty box you put it in with a pretty bow, it is still a tax, a tax, a tax," she said.

BIDs can self-impose a tax and use the revenue for projects, such as tourism promotion or downtown beautification efforts. BIDs that include hotels can currently charge up to \$2 per night, per room in extra taxes, beyond regular state and local taxes. That cap hasn't changed since 2005.

House Bill 1109 would have increased the maximum tax to \$4 per night or 4% of the rented room charge. BID districts would have had the option of raising their tax rate, but would not have been required to raise it.

The bill's prime sponsor in the House, Rep. Becky Drury, R-Rapid City, said "this is about local control" and stressed that increasing the tax would not be mandatory.

"Why are we hamstringing our local entities?" Drury asked. "They do not have to raise it."

Noem said in her written veto message that tourists would pay some of the higher taxes, but South Dakotans would also be affected.

"We are cutting taxes this legislative session, not increasing them," Noem tweeted.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Senate scraps bill to switch nominations from conventions to primaries

BY: SETH TUPPER - MARCH 7, 2023 12:13 PM

An effort to change the way many statewide candidates are nominated has failed, after it pitted factions of the Republican Party against each other for much of the current legislative session.

Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre, the Senate decided not to support House amendments to the bill or appoint a conference committee to work out the differences between the chambers. That effectively defeated the legislation.

Sen. David Johnson, R-Rapid City, was the bill's prime sponsor. He said lawmakers could not reach agreement on a path forward.

"Multiple legislators have been involved in multiple efforts over the weekend, and frankly right up to about five minutes ago," Johnson said. "Senators, we have reached an impasse with the House."

The legislation was intended to address an inconsistency in the way nominees for statewide offices are chosen to represent political parties in general elections.

Currently, nominees for governor and Congress are chosen in primary elections. Meanwhile, delegates to political party conventions choose nominees for lieutenant governor, attorney general, secretary of state, state auditor, state treasurer, commissioner of school and public lands, and public utilities commissioners.

The version of Senate Bill 40 that passed the Senate would have moved all of those nominations to primary elections, except for lieutenant governor. The bill would have allowed candidates for governor to choose their own running mate.

That version of the bill was widely viewed as a reaction to last year's state Republican convention. Del-

egates to the convention nearly forced Gov. Kristi Noem to accept her defeated primary challenger, Steve Haugaard, as her running mate instead of Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden. Republican convention delegates also dumped incumbent Secretary of State Steve Barnett in favor of Monae Johnson, who went on to win the general election after refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election.

Some Republicans want to keep the nomination process as it is, or work within the party to reform it. In the House, representatives pared the bill back to only the lieutenant governor provision.

Rather than accept and move forward with that one change, Johnson supported the motion in the Senate to defeat the bill.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

U.S. Senate panel probes how crypto mining increases energy consumption

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 7, 2023 5:44 PM

WASHINGTON — The so-called mining for digital assets, or cryptocurrency, consumes as much electricity as some entire nations, and U.S. senators explored the issue Tuesday in what they said was their first-ever hearing focused on the energy implications of digital currency.

Crypto mining in both Nebraska and Pennsylvania was discussed in particular by the members of the panel of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.

Touting his legislative proposal to improve transparency of crypto mining, Democratic Sen. Ed Markey, of Massachusetts, likened it to being “more like digital coal than digital gold” and implored the industry — Bitcoin being the most popular currency — to “work smarter, not harder” by improving energy efficiency as the world faces the effects of climate change.

“Bitcoin mining in the United States uses as much power as we need to light every single home in our country, and that demand on our grid is only going to grow,” Markey said in opening remarks.

Markey’s bill, introduced Monday, would require cryptocurrency asset operators to report emissions to the Environmental Protection Agency, and would mandate the agency to conduct a study of energy usage required by thousands of robust, special-use computers to add new transactions to the decentralized digital accounting ledger, he said. The text of the bill was not yet published.

The hearing before the Senate Subcommittee on Clean Air, Climate and Nuclear Safety featured testimony from Rob Altenburg, of PennFuture, a Pennsylvania-based clean energy advocacy organization; Courtney Dentlinger, an executive with the Nebraska Public Power District, a publicly owned utility; and Anna R. Kelles, a member of the New York State Assembly.

The subcommittee’s top Republican, Sen. Pete Ricketts, of Nebraska, pushed back on environmental concerns.

Reminding fellow members that CNBC ranked his state No. 1 last year for cultivating a crypto economy, Ricketts said he’s “particularly interested in this topic as to whether this industry could result in more economic development.”

“Crypto asset mining is hardly alone in being an industry reliant on large data server banks,” Ricketts later continued. “Finance, technology, government, academia and many others use significant amounts of electricity to power their computing needs. We should be providing the tools for open competition in a free market and not allowing politicians or bureaucrats in Washington D.C. to pick winners and losers.”

Cheap electricity in Nebraska

Both Nebraska and Pennsylvania are home to crypto mining operations.

Cheap electricity in Nebraska — 100% powered by a publicly owned utility — makes the state an attractive option for the crypto data centers, where acres of extremely fast computers encased in what look like metal shipping containers attempt to guess long combinations of numbers to verify a new transaction,

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some at speeds of up to trillions of guesses per second.

One 11-acre crypto mining site in Kearney, Nebraska, consumes as much electricity as the city itself, which has a population of 33,790, according to a local news analysis published in January.

However, the industry has had “significant benefits” for the state, Nebraska Public Power District’s Dentlinger told lawmakers, giving the example that just one of Nebraska’s crypto mining facilities generated \$1.8 million in state sales taxes and \$3.8 million in local taxes over a 12-month period.

Dentlinger also argued that consistent electricity demand from a customer benefits the wider customer base.

“In our predominantly non-metro and rural service area, diversification of businesses and economic growth is critical as these areas continue to see population declines,” she told lawmakers. “In fact, local leaders have been very receptive to crypto mining facilities as they’ve seen the potential for significant economic development benefits for their communities.”

Crypto operations pop up in Pennsylvania

PennFuture’s Altenburg argued there’s a different story in Pennsylvania, one where regulators can’t keep tabs on crypto operations popping up across the state.

Last year, a site inspection by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection found that a company in Clearfield County had plugged into a natural gas well site without seeking a permit. The company, Big Dog Energy, was running 30 natural gas generators to power its crypto operation. The EPA took the lead on investigating.

Altenburg told lawmakers it’s “impossible to know which or how many of Pennsylvania’s thousands of fracked gas wells are being used in this way.”

Another company, Stronghold Digital Mining, burns waste coal to power crypto operations. The company — which argues it is an “environmentally beneficial” Bitcoin miner for finding a use for an environmental hazard — sources from the ubiquitous piles of waste coal around the state and converts it into for electricity at two sites, one in Venango County between Pittsburgh and Erie, and the other in Carbon County northwest of Allentown, according to the company’s website.

“Waste coal is a problematic fuel to say the least. As the name implies, it has low energy value compared to ordinary coal, so plants need to burn even more to generate the same amount of electricity. In the process, they emit more ozone precursors, fine particulates, acid gases, heavy metals, and it’s the second-most carbon intensive generation, next to residual fuel oil,” Altenburg said.

Why crypto mining requires energy

Cryptocurrency mining involves the use of robust computing power to add to digital ledger technology, such as “blockchain.”

The decentralized digital financial record of transactions is a ledger or database where users, or “miners,” on a common network can agree on entries, sometimes called “blocks,” through a “consent mechanism.”

Energy usage varies depending on which consent mechanism is used. For example, Bitcoin is based on a “proof of work” mechanism, which in part ensures security of the ledger by requiring miners to have access to special computers and considerable amounts of energy.

Another popular cryptocurrency, Ethereum, recently switched to a “proof of stake” mechanism, which consumes a fraction of the energy — as of 2021 it accounted for 0.001% of global energy usage — because it relies on miners to risk a stake of their crypto assets as a way to enforce the integrity of the accounting ledger.

U.S. power usage for crypto

A September 2022 report from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy warned that cryptocurrency mining uses a significant amount of energy that has only increased over the past five years.

Crypto assets worldwide use 120 to 140 billion kilowatt-hours per year — or roughly exceeding the total energy usage of countries like Argentina or Australia, the report found.

The U.S. accounts for one-third of the world’s crypto asset operations, consuming about 0.9% to 1.7% of the nation’s electricity usage, which is about equal to the energy used to power all home computers or

all residential lighting in the U.S., according to the OSTP.

President Joe Biden ordered the interagency report in a March 2022 wide-ranging executive order on "Ensuring Responsible Development of Digital Assets," which included exploring energy implications and possible impediments to reaching the administration's climate goals.

Those goals include reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030, achieving a carbon-free electricity grid by 2035 and reaching net-zero emissions by mid-century.

Markey's bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.

Sens. Jeff Merkley, a Democrat from Oregon, and Bernie Sanders, an independent from Vermont, have signed on as co-sponsors.

Markey compared reducing the energy usage of cryptocurrency mining to updating energy standards for appliances or fuel economy for vehicles.

"We're not looking to end refrigeration or automotive technology. What we're saying is that we should be more efficient, we should be more aware of the emissions into our atmosphere that are avoidable," Markey said. "So on the one hand, this (cryptocurrency) is a very innovative sector, economically, and they count themselves as innovators. But all we're asking for them to do is look across the board at innovation."

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Economist warns that 'heightened dysfunction' in Congress raises risk of debt default

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 7, 2023 5:03 PM

WASHINGTON — Economists on Tuesday urged Congress to address the debt limit quickly, cautioning that simply because U.S. lawmakers have successfully brokered deals before doesn't mean they will be able to this year.

"There is a temptation to brush off the developing debt limit drama, thinking it will end the same way as the others over the years with lawmakers coming to terms and signing legislation just in time," Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, said in prepared remarks. "That seems a mistake given the heightened dysfunction in Congress and the large political differences gripping the nation."

Congress took three broadly bipartisan votes to suspend the debt limit during the Trump administration, but Republicans have rejected Democrats' calls for bipartisanship on the debt limit during the Biden administration.

Democrats moved a bill last December to raise the debt limit by \$2.5 trillion, but the federal government reached that \$31.4 trillion limit in mid-January.

The Treasury Department has since used accounting maneuvers, called extraordinary measures, to continue paying all of the nation's bills in full and on time, though those steps are expected to expire between late June and September.

Economists told the U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs' subcommittee on economic policy on Tuesday that Congress must act well before that summer deadline, if lawmakers want to avoid negative impacts to federal programs, the global economy and long-term financial prospects.

Maryland Democratic Sen. Chris Van Hollen asked the panelists if they agreed with speculation from some GOP lawmakers that if the U.S. enters a default, the Treasury Department would be able to prioritize which payments it makes.

Van Hollen read a quote from panelist Douglas Holtz-Eakin, president of American Action Forum, a center-right think tank, who told the senator's office that "it won't work and we will default, other than that it's a spiffy idea."

Zandi as well as Michael R. Strain, director of economic policy studies and Arthur F. Burns scholar in political economy at the American Enterprise Institute, a right-leaning policy research organization, both

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agreed with that assessment.

Amy K. Matsui, senior counsel and director of income security at the National Women's Law Center, also agreed.

A key issue with the proposal from some that the Treasury Department could prioritize certain payments, Holtz-Eakin said, is that the federal government "can't do it forever and it doesn't solve any underlying problem."

"It just kicks the problem down the road temporarily. And that's putting aside I think they don't have the legal authority... and I don't think they can execute on it," he said. "But even if they could and it was legal, it doesn't solve the basic problem."

Zandi told the panel that if Congress doesn't take action on the debt limit and the United States were to default, it wouldn't be possible to put the genie back in the bottle, in response to a question from New Jersey Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez.

"It's not possible," Zandi said. "Since the founding of the nation, this was a principle that we established. Alexander Hamilton, the first Treasury secretary, bought back the revolutionary war debt on pennies on the dollar to establish the credit of the United States — that we are money good, if you put your money with us, you're good."

"If we for one second go over the line and not pay in a timely way, we lose that forever," Zandi added. "And it's incalculable, the cost."

Louisiana Republican Sen. John Kennedy, the ranking member on the panel, pledged at the beginning of the hearing he would not vote for a default on the debt, though he didn't explicitly say he would vote to raise or suspend the debt limit.

Kennedy voted against the legislation that raised the debt limit in December, as did all other Senate Republicans and all but one House Republican.

"This United States senator will not vote to default on America's debt," Kennedy said. "We have a lot of it. But there's a moral principle involved and a practical principle involved. And if you're going to have a party you gotta pay the band and it's time for us to pay the band and we're going to do it."

"However, I think you will see some of us — including, but not limited to the House Republicans — use this as an opportunity to talk about our rate of growth and spending and to talk about the rate of growth and our debt accumulation," Kennedy added. "And that's not unusual."

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

New Dakota language app helps bridge gap between elders and youth

BY: COLLEEN CONNELLY - MARCH 7, 2023 10:04 AM

Khloe Cavanaugh learned some Dakota words from her grandfather growing up on the Spirit Lake Reservation in North Dakota. He was one of the few fluent first language speakers on the reservation.

"I have an Indian name and I didn't know how to say it in Dakota, so he taught me how to say it and how to introduce myself," said Cavanaugh.

"Haŋ Mitáuyepi, Chaŋte waštéya napé čhiyúzapi. Dakǎóta ia Heħaka Thašina Wakħaŋ Wi emákiyapi. Wašiču ia Khloe Cavanaugh emákiyapi."

"(Hello my friends and relatives, I greet you with a good heart and handshake. My Dakota name is Heħaka Thašina Wakħaŋ Wi and my English name is Khloe Cavanaugh.)"

Cavanaugh, a freshman at the University of Minnesota, is studying beginners Dakota and considering a major in American Indian studies, with a focus on developing mastery of the language. And now, she has a new tool — co-created by her Dakota teacher, Šišókadúta — to help her remember vocab words and work on pronunciation: a Dakota language dictionary app.

The free app, called Dakhód Iápi Wičhóie Wówapi, was unveiled last month at an event at the Grand Casino Mille Lacs in Onamia, Minnesota. It contains over 28,000 words in Dakota and includes a Dakota

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language keyboard and audio recordings of first language speakers — both men and women — saying the words so users can learn how they are pronounced. It's a vital resource not just for preserving the language, but also for learning vocab on the fly. There's no Google Translate or other online dictionary for Dakota.

The app is meant to bridge the gap between the handful of Native speakers left — many in their 80s and 90s — and the younger generation, like Cavanaugh. Many Dakota speakers stopped speaking the language and passing it onto their children around the 1950s, partly due to Native American boarding schools, which punished and shamed students for speaking their languages.

In Cavanaugh's family, the same thing happened. Neither of her parents speak Dakota, but she now teaches them words over the phone and practices conversations in Dakota with them when she goes home, translating if they don't understand. The app makes it easy, with a resource right in her pocket.

Sišókadúta, whose English name is Joe Bendickson, is the linguistic director of Dakhóta Iápi Okhódakičhiye, a nonprofit dedicated to creating materials to help people learn the Dakota language. In 2017, the nonprofit reached out to The Language Conservancy, which works to preserve and promote endangered languages, and received funding from the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council to create a dictionary app. After six years of recording — and re-recording — words, the free app is now available for anyone to use.

"The first language speakers are all elderly now," Sišókadúta said. "People can't live forever. We don't want anything bad to happen to them, but we have to plan for these contingencies. Eventually those people will be gone, and we have to get as many words as we can while they're still here with us."

Like Cavanaugh, Dakota skipped a generation in Sišókadúta's family as well. Three of his grandparents spoke the language fluently, but they didn't teach their children. Sišókadúta began learning it in 2000 and now considers himself highly proficient. When he first started, he said there wasn't a lot of interest in learning Dakota. But in the past five years, interest has skyrocketed, especially among young Dakota people. His classes at the University of Minnesota used to have between 8 and 15 people signed up for the beginner level. Now he gets 50-60.

Wil Meya, CEO of The Language Conservancy, said this is a trend he sees in working with other languages, too. The nonprofit has made dictionary apps and e-learning materials for 50 languages, including Lakota, Apache, Ho-Chunk and Ute.

"We know that young people truly want to learn their language," Meya said. "We just need to put it into a form that is accessible for them. We sometimes hear young people say the apps are like having grandma or grandpa in their pocket. And often it is their grandma or grandpa on the app, providing the voice."

Sišókadúta and Dakhóta Iápi Okhódakičhiye recorded words spoken by seven first language speakers from the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate tribe in South Dakota, the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana, the Whitecap Dakota First Nation band in Saskatchewan, Canada, and the Birdtail Sioux First Nation in Manitoba. Sišókadúta and another Dakota language instructor at the University of Minnesota also recorded some words to fill in gaps when the audio files weren't clear enough.

Much of the state of Minnesota is Dakota ancestral territory, but many were forced to relocate after the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Today, Minnesota has four federally recognized Dakota communities — and only one first language Dakota speaker from those communities.

"This is a critical time for the language, which at one time was the language of the state," Meya said. "In the pre-contact period, most people in the area were speaking Dakota, or if not Ojibwe. But it was a language that was used by thousands of people for tens of thousands of years."

The dictionary app itself is just a tool for learning the language, but it's part of a larger effort to revitalize the language and even create future generations of first language speakers. The nonprofit will continue to add words to the app and interview elders who might have new insights to share about the language. For Sišókadúta, the work is ongoing.

"The dictionary app isn't going to speak the language for you, it's up to you to speak it and use it and read it and write it," he said. "But it's a tool for helping you learn. I hope all of our people can take advantage of that. Every word you speak, you're breathing life into the language."

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Šišókadúta has been heartened to see more and more Dakota students interested in learning the language. When he started learning, he said about 50% of his class were Dakota. The rest were non-native or non-Dakota people interested in the language. His classes today are 80-90% Dakota, or from nearby nations.

Ava Hartwell, who is Oglala Lakota, is one of Šišókadúta's students. She was first interested in learning Lakota, but without a formal class available, she struggled to learn it on her own. Though she's still in high school at Avalon Charter School in St. Paul, the 16-year-old asked to join Šišókadúta's class to learn Dakota, which is very similar to Lakota. She's now in her second semester.

Hartwell said she uses the new Dakota app every day to broaden her vocabulary. At the grocery store, she'll take her phone out to look up the names of food she's buying, like green beans (omníča suthúrj šni) or soap (haípažaža).

It's much easier than using the outdated dictionaries that already exist. The last substantive dictionary was published by missionaries in 1852.

For Hartwell, access to learning Dakota has been transformational. Her father is Lakota, and she had some exposure to the culture through his family, but it wasn't until she started learning Dakota that she really connected to her identity.

"Personally I've seen immense growth in my confidence," she said. "Learning the Dakota language comes with learning the Dakota mindset and ways of our people. You learn to just appreciate everything for what it is."

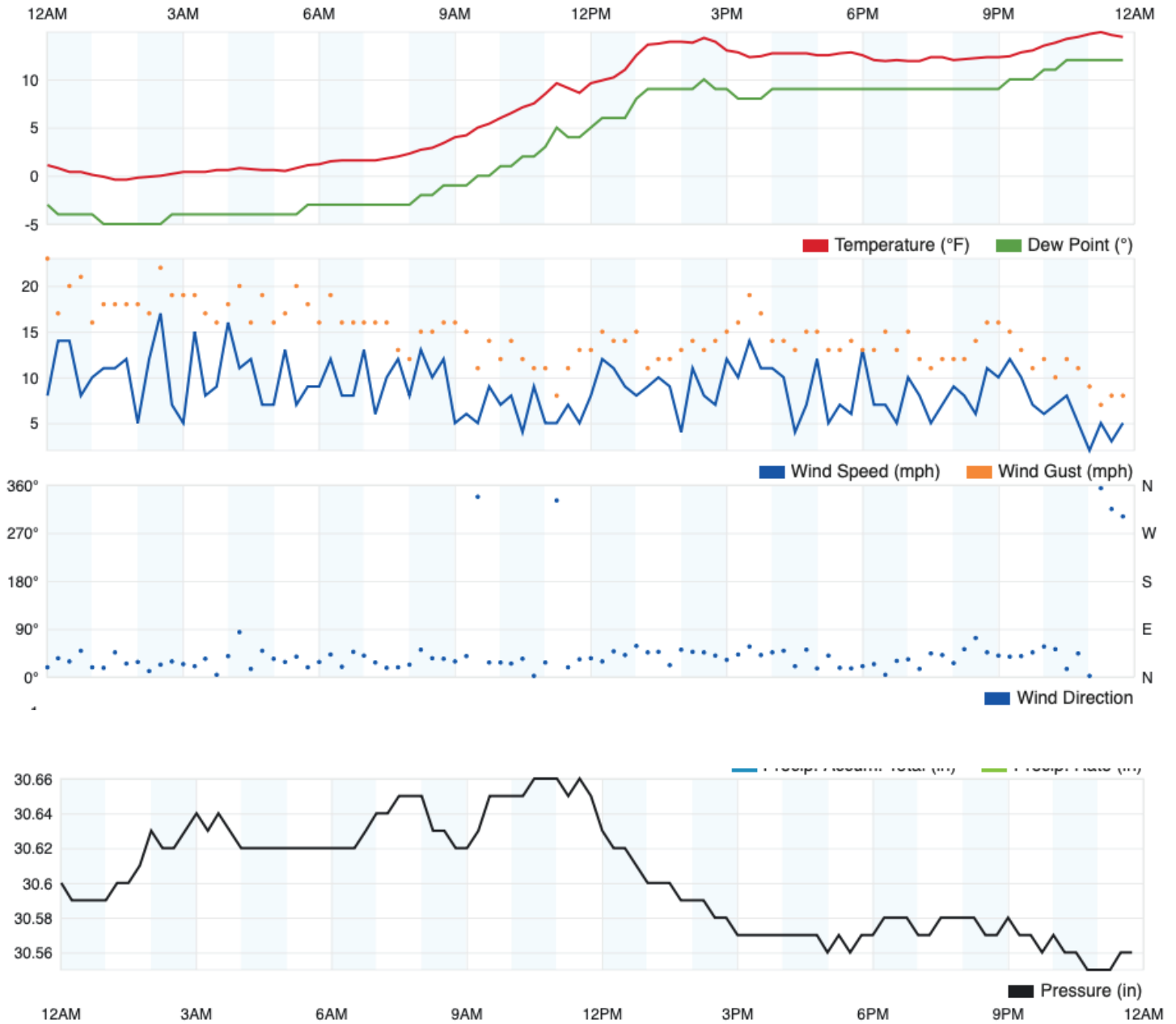
This story was originally published by Minnesota Reformer, which like South Dakota Searchlight is part of States Newsroom, a network of news bureaus supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity. Minnesota Reformer maintains editorial independence. Contact Editor Patrick Coolican for questions: info@minnesotareformer.com. Follow Minnesota Reformer on Facebook and Twitter.

Colleen Connolly is a Minneapolis-based bilingual journalist for Minnesota Reformer, writing about immigration, education, Latin America and other issues. Connolly has also worked as a digital news editor at the Chicago Tribune and NBC Chicago.

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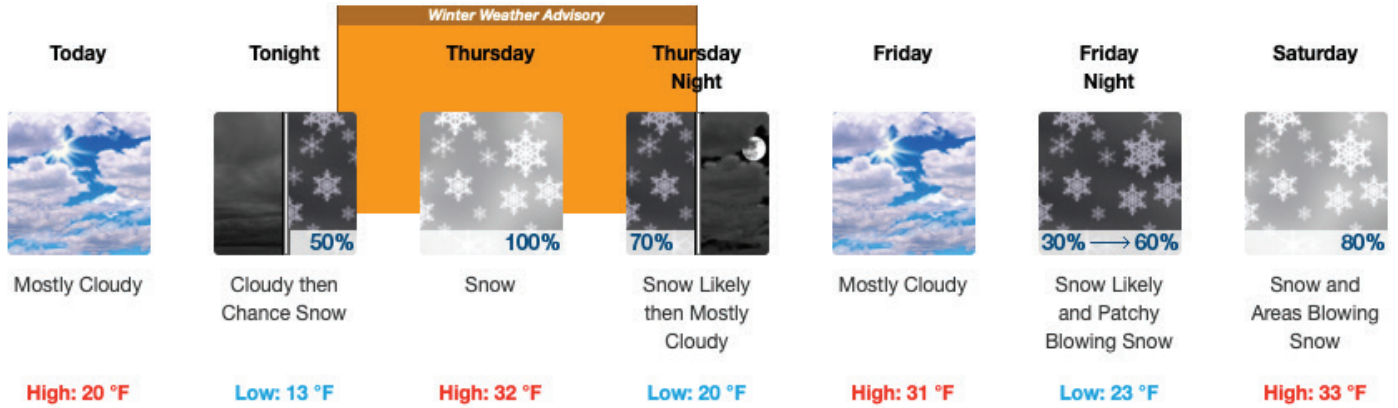
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Active Weather Pattern into the Weekend March 8, 2023 4:07 AM

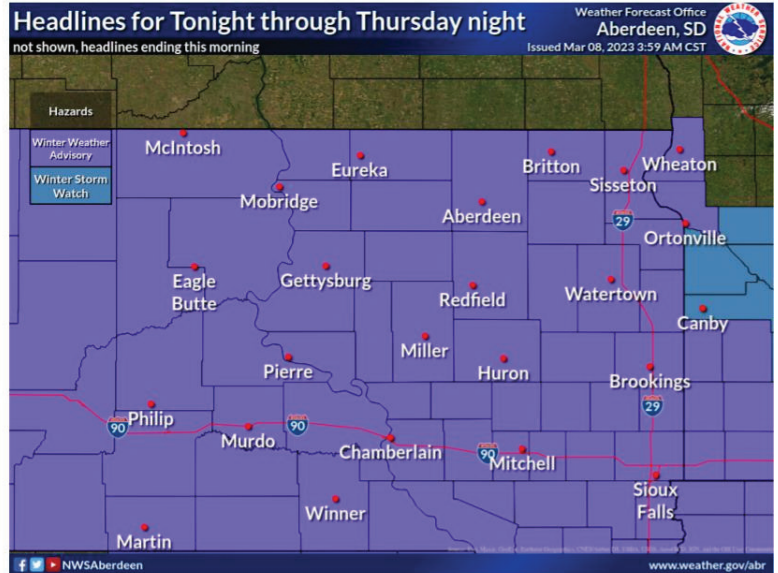
Key Messages:

- Overnight Tonight through Thursday night: 3 to 5 inches of widespread snow, with locally higher amounts along the Sisseton Hills.
- Winds increase Friday afternoon through Saturday, which could cause area of drifting or blowing snow.
- Friday night through Saturday night: Light to moderate snow accumulations mainly over north central to northeastern SD and west central MN.

NEW

Important Updates

Potential for 6"+ snowfall has again decreased slightly for tonight through Thursday night.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Widespread snow will return overnight tonight through Thursday morning. Expect 3 to 5 inches of snow, with locally higher amounts along the Sisseton Hills. Winds will increase Friday afternoon through Saturday and could cause areas of drifting or blowing snow. The last round of snow for the week will be Friday night through Saturday night over mainly north central to northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota.

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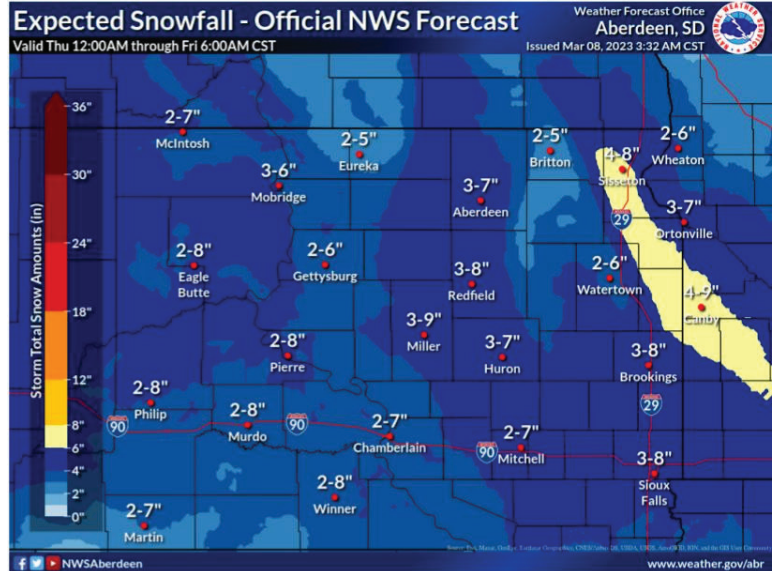


Widespread Snow overnight tonight through Thursday night

March 8, 2023
4:10 AM

3 to 5 inches of widespread snow expected, with locally higher amounts along the Sisseton Hills. Most of the snow falling during the daytime hours Thursday. Winds out of the northeast gusting 15 to 30 mph during the daytime hours Thursday to cause patchy blowing snow mainly over the Leola Hills and Sisseton Hills.

	Wed 6AM	Wed 12PM	Wed 6PM	Thu 12AM	Thu 6AM	Thu 12PM	Thu 6PM	Fri 12AM	Fri 6AM
Aberdeen				≤1"	2-3"	1-2"	≤1"		
Watertown				T	1-2"	1-2"	≤1"		
Eagle Butte				1-2"	1-2"	1-2"			
Milbank				T	1-2"	2-3"	1-2"	T	
Redfield				≤1"	2-3"	2-3"	≤1"		
Pierre				1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	T		
Murdo				≤1"	1-2"	≤1"	T		
Sisseton				T	2-3"	2-3"	≤1"	≤1"	
Mobridge				≤1"	1-2"	1-2"	≤1"		
Wheaton	T			T	1-2"	1-2"	≤1"	T	



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Widespread snow will return overnight tonight through Thursday morning. Expect 3 to 5 inches of snow, with locally higher amounts along the Sisseton Hills.



Snow Friday night through Saturday night

March 8, 2023
4:12 AM

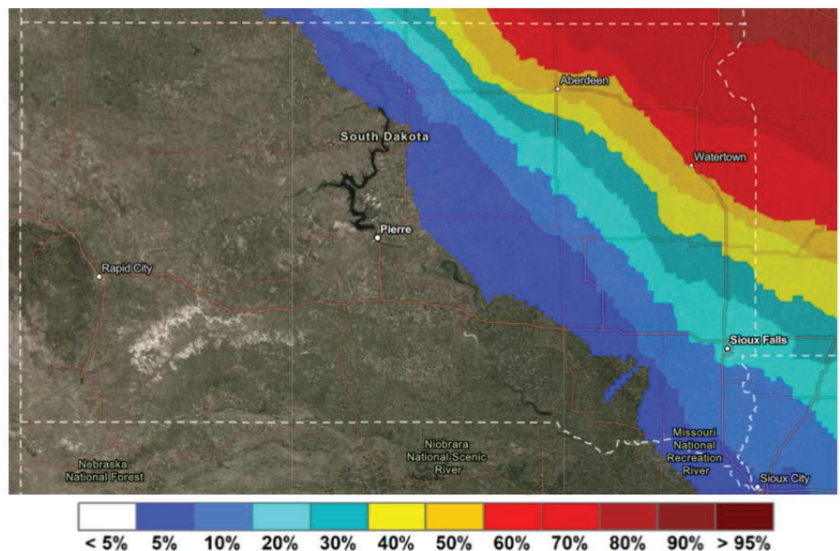
Potential for Minor Weather Impacts for Saturday

Friday night through Saturday night: Light to moderate snow accumulations mainly over north central to northeastern SD and west central MN.

Stay tuned to the latest forecast, as there could be several changes. A southwestern or northeastern shift to the main area of concern remains possible.

Minor Impacts

- Expect a few inconveniences to daily life.
- Winter driving conditions. Use caution while driving.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Winter Weather Advisory

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE

National Weather Service Aberdeen SD

259 AM CST Wed Mar 8 2023

Traverse-Big Stone-Corson-Campbell-McPherson-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Walworth-Edmunds-Day-Dewey-Potter-Faulk-Spink-Clark-Codington-Grant-Hamlin-Deuel-Stanley-Sully-Hughes-Hyde-Hand-Jones-Lyman-Buffalo-

Including the cities of Wheaton, Ortonville, McIntosh, Herreid, Eureka, Aberdeen, Britton, Sisseton, Moberly, Ipswich, Webster, Isabel, Gettysburg, Faulkton, Redfield, Clark, Watertown, Milbank, Hayti, Clear Lake, Fort Pierre, Onida, Pierre, Highmore, Miller, Murdo, Kennebec, and Fort Thompson

...WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY IN EFFECT FROM 3 AM CST /2 AM MST/ THURSDAY TO MIDNIGHT CST /11 PM MST/ THURSDAY NIGHT...

* WHAT...Snow expected. Total snow accumulations of 3 to 5 inches. Locally higher amounts possible along the Coteau.

* WHERE...Portions of west central Minnesota and central, north central and northeast South Dakota.

* WHEN...From 3 AM CST /2 AM MST/ Thursday to midnight CST /11 PM MST/ Thursday night.

* IMPACTS...Plan on slippery road conditions. The hazardous conditions could impact the morning or evening commute.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Slow down and use caution while traveling.

In Minnesota, the latest road conditions can be obtained at 511mn.org, or by calling 5 1 1. In South Dakota, the latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 15 °F at 11:08 PM

Low Temp: 0 °F at 1:38 AM

Wind: 22 mph at 2:26 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 33 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 65 in 2021

Record Low: -32 in 1995

Average High: 37

Average Low: 16

Average Precip in March.: 0.19

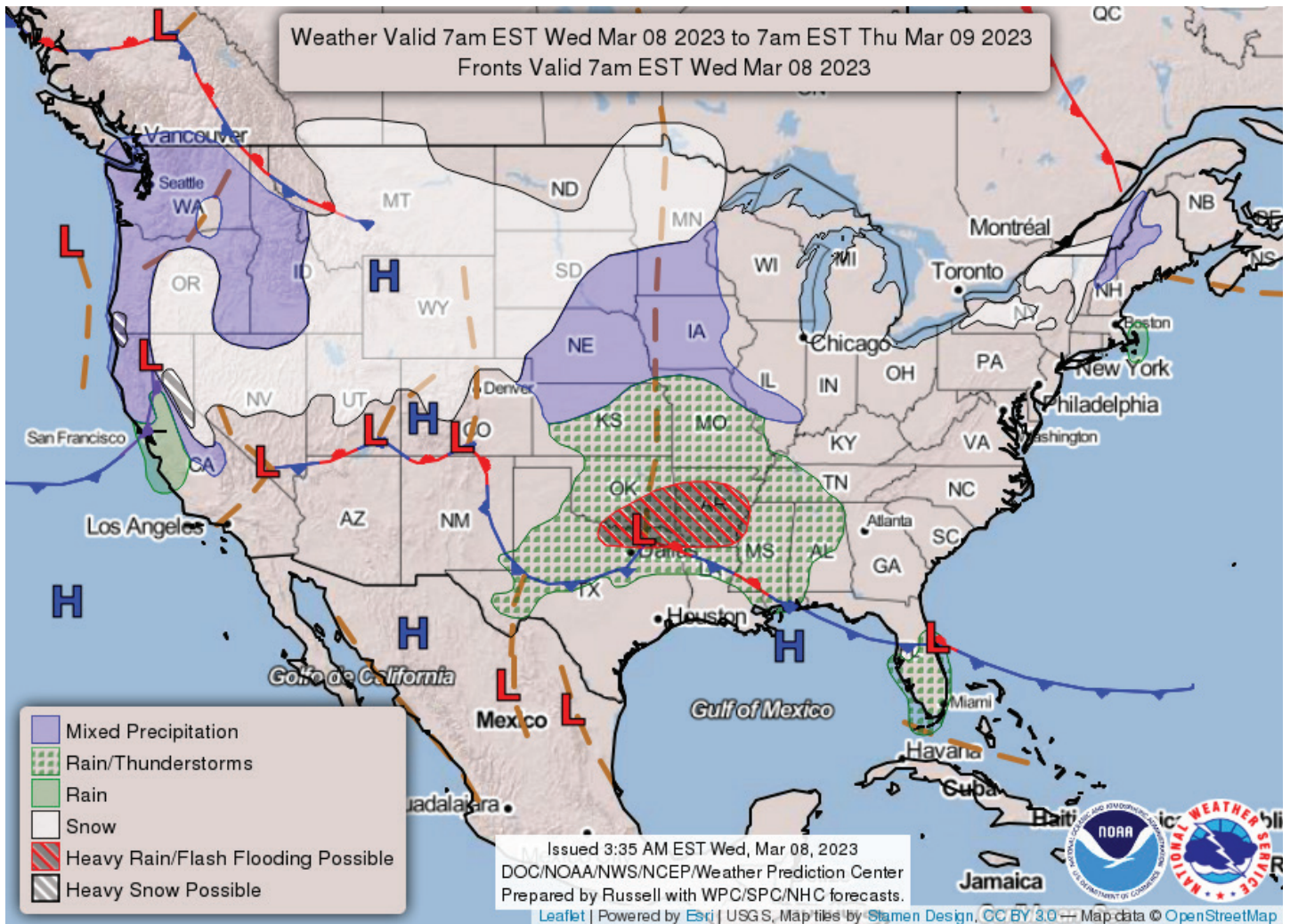
Precip to date in March.: 0.20

Average Precip to date: 1.36

Precip Year to Date: 1.78

Sunset Tonight: 66:30:01 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:54:26 AM



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Today in Weather History

March 8, 2000: High winds of 30 to 50 mph, combined with 3 to 7 inches of snow, caused widespread blizzard conditions across north-central South Dakota. As a result, many schools were closed early in the day. Travel was also significantly disrupted. Telephone service went down for several hours between Moberg and Selby. Some heavy snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Eagle Butte, Selby, and Hoven and 7 inches southwest of Keldron.

March 8, 2013: An area of low pressure moving across the region brought warm moist air overtop low-level cold air, which resulted in the widespread freezing rain across much of northeast South Dakota during the evening and into the early morning hours of the 8th and 9th. For much of the area, the precipitation changed to all rain before ending as temperatures rose above freezing. Ice accumulations ranged from a tenth of an inch to a half of an inch. Some ice accumulation reports include; 0.25 inches at Garden City, Hayti, Waubay, Clear Lake, Sisseton, and Summit and 0.50 inches near Florence and Clark. Travel became hazardous, with no significant accidents reported. Also, no problems with power outages or tree damage were reported.

1669: The 1669 eruption of Mount Etna is the largest-recorded historical eruption of the volcano on the east coast of Sicily, Italy. After several weeks of increasing seismic activity that damaged the town of Nicolosi and other settlements, an eruption fissure opened on the southeastern flank of Etna during the night of 10-11 March. Several more cracks became active on March 11, erupting pyroclastics and tephra that fell over Sicily and accumulated to form the Monti Rossi scoria cone.

1909: The town of Brinkley, Arkansas, was struck by an estimated F4 tornado, which killed 49 people. The tornado, which was two-thirds of a mile wide, destroyed 860 buildings. Entire families were killed as houses were completely swept away by the storm.

1972: A wind gust of 207 mph was recorded on a Bendix-Friez Aerovane anemometer at Phase Shack #7, located six miles east of the Thule Air Force Base in Greenland. Winds were sustained at over 146 mph for three hours during the storm.

1989: While Arctic cold gripped the northeastern U.S., unseasonably warm weather prevailed across the southwestern states. Albany, New York, reported a record low of 2 degrees below zero. Tucson, Arizona, reported a record high of 90 degrees.

2000: An F1 tornado traveled a short distance across Milwaukee, Wisconsin, during the evening hours. The tornado injured 16 people.

2017: Malta's famous Azure Window rock arch has collapsed into the sea after heavy storms. 2018: A horseshoe cloud was seen over Battle Mountain, Nevada. Click [HERE](#) for pictures from the NWS Office in Elko, Nevada.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

SEARCHING EVERYWHERE

The phone rang and a small child answered it softly. "Hello," he said barely above a whisper.

"Hello," came the response. "Is your mother home?"

"Yes," came the reply, "but she's busy."

"Well," wondered the caller, "is your father home?"

"Yes," he said, "but he's busy, too."

"Are they both busy? What are they doing?" asked the salesman.

"They're looking for me. They think I'm lost," he whispered.

What a picture of our Savior! He said, "I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save the lost!"

This verse comes at the end of the story of Zacchaeus. Sometimes we focus on the different facts in the story: he was very short, the son of Abraham, he was a very influential man, and he was an unpopular tax collector. None of these facts actually mattered to Jesus.

What did matter to Jesus, then and now, is that a person is not saved because of his family, his wealth, his influence in the community, his appearance or his previous way of life. It is only through faith in the Son of God that the lost can be forgiven and made new.

In one verse Jesus summarized His entire mission: to seek and to save the lost. Wherever or whoever they are, whatever they have done, Jesus continues to seek the lost.

Prayer: Lord, we may have much, but You ask little - only that we, in faith, accept You as our Savior. Help us to understand that all we need to do is to accept You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. Luke 19:10



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 07/04/2023 Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.07.23

15 22 25 28 69 21

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$203,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 35
DRAW: Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.06.23

2 17 25 35 50 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$39,330,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 35 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.07.23

10 28 30 37 38 1

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 5 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.04.23

1 2 9 19 21

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$79,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 35 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.06.23

10 19 26 47 55 21

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 34 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.06.23

2 13 29 58 69 4

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$31,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 34 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A SoDak 16=

Dakota Valley 94, Miller 41

Elk Point-Jefferson 58, Waubay/Summit 50

Hamlin 66, Madison 41

Hot Springs 47, Winner 43

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 82, Pine Ridge 66

Sioux Falls Christian 73, Hanson 31

Sioux Valley 73, Groton Area 56

Class B SoDak 16=

Aberdeen Christian 51, Ipswich 34

Castlewood 53, Harding County 51

DeSmet 89, Crazy Horse 54

Ethan 52, Gregory 37

Lower Brule 72, Irene-Wakonda 50

Viborg-Hurley 62, Wessington Springs 56

White River 72, Howard 51

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. March 7, 2023.

Editorial: Bill's Defeat Affirms Power Of Voters

The defeat of a bill that would have effectively made it more difficult for people to put an initiative on the state ballot is a victory for the public and their power to create change in South Dakota.

House Bill 1200 would have reconfigured the demands for getting an initiated measure placed on a ballot by mandating that petition drives for initiatives must get a certain percentage of signatures from each county. According to South Dakota Searchlight, that would have required getting about 1,000 signatures from each legislative district.

The bill passed the House by a 47-22 margin last month, but it was derailed last week when a Senate committee banished HB 1200 to the limbo of the 41st day of the 40-day session, effectively killing it.

On the face of it, HB 1200 might seem to make sense. It could be argued that a statewide measure should have a certain level of support from around South Dakota in general, which would include gathering signatures from each of the state's 35 legislative districts.

But the measure would place more burden on those seeking to put an initiative on the ballot. It would require considerably more coordination of strategies and, notably, much more cost in mobilizing workers to fan out across the state to gather a sufficient number of signatures from each district.

The bill seems to be part of an ongoing effort by some lawmakers to make it more difficult for the public to get involved in the lawmaking process. This included last year's proposed Amendment C, which would have raised the passage of initiated measures from 50% plus one vote to a 60% supermajority.

Not surprisingly, this effort isn't unique to South Dakota. Bloomberg News reported last year that several states, including South Dakota, had been pursuing measures to make it tougher for the public to get items

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on the ballot or to make it easier for lawmakers in some states to overturn voter-approved measures.

"It is a death by 1,000 cuts," Kelly Hall, executive director of the Fairness Project, told Bloomberg News. "Very rarely do we see an attack on our democracy that is an outright ban on voting or on ballot measures."

The rejection of HB 1200 affirms the power of voters to affect change in our laws. It likely won't be the last attempt, however, and the people must remain vigilant.

ORU rides fast start to Summit title past N. Dakota St.

STIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Max Abmas scored 26 points and distributed 11 assists and Oral Roberts overwhelmed North Dakota State 92-58 in the Summit League Tournament championship game Tuesday night clinching an automatic berth into the NCAA Tournament.

Reserve Patrick Mwamba scored 17 of his 20 points in the first half and Isaac McBride, Connor Vanover and reserve Deshang Weaver each scored 10 points for Oral Roberts

Oral Roberts (30-4) finished 18-0 in league play and won twice in the league's post-season tournament. It's the program's seventh NCAA Tournament berth.

The Golden Eagles failed to make the NCAA Tournament last year following its 2021 run to the Sweet 16, which ended with a 72-70 loss to Arkansas.

When asked what it would take to duplicate the 2021 run after beating down the Bison, Abmas said, "We've got to continue the intensity that we've had in this (Summit) tournament."

Mwamba's 17 points in 13 minutes before intermission and his six field goals (three from 3-point range) almost matched North Dakota's seven total in 26 attempts and the Golden Eagles led 51-20 at halftime. Oral Roberts built an 18-3 lead and never trailed.

Boden Skunberg scored 18 points, Andrew Morgan 13 and Damari Wheeler-Thomas 10 for the Bison (16-17).

Oklahoma voters reject legalizing recreational marijuana

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma voters on Tuesday rejected the legalization of recreational marijuana, following a late blitz of opposition from faith leaders, law enforcement and prosecutors.

Oklahoma would have become the 22nd state to legalize adult use of cannabis and join conservative states like Montana and Missouri that have approved similar proposals in recent years. Many conservative states have also rejected the idea, including Arkansas, North Dakota and South Dakota last year.

Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt and many of the state's GOP legislators, including nearly every Republican senator, opposed the idea. Former Republican Gov. Frank Keating, an ex-FBI agent, and Terri White, the former head of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, led the "no" campaign.

"We're pleased the voters have spoken," said Pat McFerron, a Republican political strategist who ran the opposition campaign. "We think this sends a clear signal that voters are not happy with the recreational nature of our medicinal system. We also think it shows voters recognize the criminal aspects, as well as the need for addressing mental health needs of the state."

Oklahoma voters already approved medical marijuana in 2018 by 14 percentage points and the state has one of the most liberal programs in the country, with more than 2,800 licensed dispensaries and roughly 10% of the state's adult population having a medical license to buy and consume cannabis.

On Tuesday's legalization question, the "no" side was outspent more than 20-to-1, with supporters of the initiative spending more than \$4.9 million, compared to about \$219,000 against, last-minute campaign finance reports show.

State Question 820, the result of a signature gathering drive last year, was the only item on the statewide ballot, and early results showed heavy opposition in rural areas.

"Oklahoma is a law and order state," Stitt said in a statement after Tuesday's vote. "I remain committed to protecting Oklahomans and my administration will continue to hold bad actors accountable and crack

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down on illegal marijuana operations in our state.”

The proposal, if passed, would have allowed anyone over the age of 21 to purchase and possess up to 1 ounce of marijuana, plus concentrates and marijuana-infused products. Recreational sales would have been subjected to a 15% excise tax on top of the standard sales tax. The excise tax would be used to help fund local municipalities, the court system, public schools, substance abuse treatment and the state’s general revenue fund.

The prospect of having more Oklahomans smoking anything, including marijuana, didn’t sit well with Mark Grossman, an attorney who voted against the proposal Tuesday at the Crown Heights Christian Church in Oklahoma City.

“I was a no vote because I’m against smoking,” Grossman said. “Tobacco smoking was a huge problem for my family.”

The low barriers for entry into Oklahoma’s medical marijuana industry has led to a flood of growers, processors and dispensary operators competing for a limited number of customers. Supporters had hoped the state’s marijuana industry would be buoyed by a rush of out-of-state customers, particularly from Texas, which has close to 8 million people in the Dallas-Fort Worth area just a little more than an hour drive from the Oklahoma border.

Michelle Tilley, campaign director for Yes on 820, said despite Tuesday’s result, full marijuana legalization was inevitable. She noted that almost 400,000 Oklahomans already use marijuana legally and “many thousands more” use it illegally.

“A two-tiered system, where one group of Oklahomans is free to use this product and the other is treated like criminals does not make logical sense,” she said in a statement.

South Dakota State women cruise to Summit tourney title

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Haleigh Timmer scored 13 of her 18 points in the first half when the outcome was essentially settled and top-seeded South Dakota State defeated sixth-seeded Omaha 93-51 on Tuesday to win the Summit League Tournament championship and a bid to the NCAA Tournament.

Timmer was 7-of-8 shooting and made all four of her 3-point attempts. Paige Meyer added 16 points, shooting 5 of 6 from the floor and making all five of her free throws. Paiton Burckhard had 14 points and two-time league player of the year Myah Selland scored 10 of her 11 in the first half.

The Jackrabbits shot 62%, made 13 of 19 3-point tries and scored 29 points off 17 turnovers, including 10 steals. Tori Nelson blocked four shots and Kallie Theisen three.

Katie Keitges scored 11 points for the Mavericks (15-17), who shot 34%.

The Jackrabbits (28-5) never trailed, led 21-8 after the first quarter and 44-16 at the half, shooting 65% to 20% for the Mavericks. A 12-0 run extended the lead to 30 late in the half.

The 42-point margin of victory is the largest in the tournament’s history.

“It was a great game for us,” Jackrabbits coach Aaron Johnston said in a postgame TV interview. “You never know how these are going to go. Obviously, Omaha has been playing really well. Earlier this year they had us down at half and had a really tough game. So kind of felt like it might be that again but we were really locked in defensively here.”

After a 62-44 loss at home to top-ranked South Carolina on Dec. 15, the Jackrabbits swept through an undefeated Summit League season, winning by an average of 27 points. Their three league tournament victories extends their program-record win streak to 21.

The Jackrabbits (28-5) are 10-2 in Summit League title games and will be making their 11th NCAA Tournament appearance and first since 2021 when they received an at-large bid. Their last league tournament title came in 2019 when they went on to reach the Sweet 16.

South Dakota State beat the Mavericks in their regular-season meetings 68-61 in Omaha and 87-54 at home.

The sixth-seeded Mavericks (8-11) were picked to finish last in the preseason league poll. They beat North Dakota and Kansas City to reach the title game.

Germany cautious over Nord Stream pipeline attack reports

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Germany's defense minister voiced caution Wednesday over media reports that a pro-Ukraine group was involved in blowing up the Nord Stream gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea last year.

German daily newspaper Die Zeit and public broadcasters ARD and SWR reported Tuesday that investigators were able to largely reconstruct how the pipelines from Russia to Germany were sabotaged on the night of Sept. 26, 2022.

Citing multiple unnamed officials, the news outlets reported that five men and a woman used a yacht hired by a Ukrainian-owned company in Poland to carry out the attack. German federal prosecutors confirmed that a boat was searched in January.

The New York Times also reported Tuesday that U.S. officials reviewed intelligence that suggested a pro-Ukrainian group was behind the blasts. The Ukrainian government has denied involvement.

German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said he read the news reports "with great interest" but warned against drawing hasty conclusions.

"We need to clearly differentiate whether it was a Ukrainian group that acted on the orders of Ukraine or (...) without the government's knowledge," he told reporters in Stockholm.

Speaking on the sidelines of a European Union defense ministers meeting, Pistorius said some experts also had raised the possibility of a so-called false flag operation by a group pretending to be Ukrainian.

"It would not be the first time in the history of such events," the German minister said. "As such, I'm refraining from drawing premature conclusions."

Asked whether the reports could undermine Western support for Ukraine, Pistorius said he preferred to respond once he had reliable information. "Anything else is hypothetical," he added.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov rejected suggestions that the attack might have been ordered by Kyiv. "It's like a compliment for our special forces, but this is not our activity," he told reporters in Stockholm.

According to the German media reports, the suspects used forged passports when hiring the boat, which set off from the German port of Rostock. A captain, two divers, two diving assistants and a doctor made up the group, ARD reported.

Germany's Federal Prosecutors Office declined to comment directly on the reports. But it confirmed that investigators conducted a search from Jan. 18-20 "in connection with a suspicious boat hire."

"There is a suspicion that the boat in question could have been to transport explosive devices that exploded on Sept. 26, 2022, on the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines," the prosecutors office said in an email to The Associated Press. "The evaluation of the seized traces and objects is ongoing."

"The identity of the perpetrators and their motives are the subject of ongoing investigations," it added. "At present, it is not possible to make any reliable statements on this, in particular on the question of state control."

"In the course of the further investigation, all leads to clarify the facts of the case will be pursued," prosecutors said. "There are no grounds for suspecting employees of the German company that leased the ship."

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby declined Tuesday to comment on the New York Times report, noting that investigations by Denmark, Germany, and Sweden remain active.

"We need to let these investigations conclude," Kirby said. "And only then should we be looking at what follow-on actions might or may not be appropriate."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Wednesday described the media reports alleging Ukrainian involvement in the Nord Stream explosions as a coordinated manipulation intended to cover up the organizers of the attack.

"The masterminds of the terror attack clearly want to distract attention," Peskov said in remarks carried by the state RIA Novosti news agency.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his officials have accused the U.S. of staging the pipeline explosions, which they described as a terror attack.

Peskov again noted that Russia was denied access to evidence from the investigation. He called for a transparent international probe.

The Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines have long been a target of criticism by the United States and some of its allies, who warned that they posed a risk to Europe's energy security by increasing dependence on Russian gas.

Germany halted certification of the still-uncommissioned Nord Stream 2 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and Moscow stopped the flow of gas in Nord Stream 1 weeks before the attack.

Dutch gas transport and storage company Gasunie said Wednesday it does not expect the sabotaged Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines to come back into service any time soon and has written off its multimillion-euro investment in the project.

"In the current geopolitical context, Gasunie does not foresee a resumption of gas deliveries via Nord Stream for the foreseeable future and, as a result, does not expect to receive any more dividends," the company said in its annual report.

Gasunie, whose transportation and storage activities serve the Netherlands and parts of Germany, had invested 508 million euros for a 9% stake in Nord Stream. It slashed the value of the investment in July to 240 million euros and now has written it off entirely.

Oldest reference to Norse god Odin found in Denmark treasure

By JAMES BROOKS Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Scandinavian scientists said Wednesday that they have identified the oldest-known inscription referencing the Norse god Odin on part of a gold disc unearthed in western Denmark in 2020.

Lisbeth Imer, a runologist with the National Museum in Copenhagen, said the inscription represented the first solid evidence of Odin being worshipped as early as the 5th century, or at least 150 years earlier than the previous oldest known reference — on a brooch found in southern Germany and dated to the second half of the 6th century.

The disc discovered in Denmark was part of a trove containing about a kilogram (2.2 pounds) of gold, including large medallions the size of saucers and Roman coins made into jewelry. It was unearthed in the village of Vindelev, central Jutland, and dubbed the Vindelev Hoard.

Experts think the cache was buried 1,500 years ago, either to hide it from enemies or as a tribute to appease the gods. A golden bracteate, a kind of thin, ornamental pendant, which carried an inscription that read, "He is Odin's man," likely referring to an unknown king or overlord.

"It's one of the best executed runic inscriptions that I have ever seen," Imer said. Runes are symbols that early tribes in northern Europe used to communicate in writing.

Odin was one of the main gods in Norse mythology and was frequently associated with war as well as poetry.

More than 1,000 bracteates have been found in northern Europe, according to the National Museum in Copenhagen, where the trove discovered in 2020 is on display.

Krister Vasshus, an ancient language specialist, said that because runic inscriptions are rare, "every runic inscription (is) vital to how we understand the past."

"When an inscription of this length appears, that in itself is amazing," Vasshus said. "It gives us some quite interesting information about religion in the past, which also tells us something about society in the past."

During the Viking Age, considered to be from 793 to 1066, Norsemen known as Vikings undertook large-scale raiding, colonizing, conquest and trading throughout Europe. They also reached North America.

The Norsemen worshipped many gods and each of them had various characteristics, weaknesses and attributes. Based on sagas and some rune stones, details have emerged that the gods possessed many human traits and could behave like humans.

"That kind of mythology can take us further and have us reinvestigate all the other 200 bracteate inscriptions that we know," Imer said.

World marks Women's Day but abuses, inequality still rampant

By CIARÁN GILES Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of people are set to take part in demonstrations, rallies, and colorful events around the globe on Wednesday to mark International Women's Day, the date established to celebrate women and demand equality for half the planet's population.

While there have been major advances in dozens of countries, the situation in places such as Afghanistan and Iran and the constant crimes and violations in nearly every nation in the world are a cold reminder that there is still a long road ahead.

On Monday, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres note that women's rights are being "abused, threatened and violated" around the world and gender equality won't be achieved for 300 years on the current track. He said that progress won over decades is vanishing because "the patriarchy is fighting back."

The day is commemorated in different way and degrees in different countries.

In Spain, more than 1 million people are expected to take the streets in raucous evening demonstrations in Madrid, Barcelona, and every Spanish city. Big rallies are also expected in many other cities around the world, while in some countries only minor events are held.

Women gathered Wednesday for rallies in Pakistan's major cities, including the capital, Islamabad, amid tight security. Organizers said they would be peaceful and that the marches are only aimed at seeking rights guaranteed by the constitution.

Some conservative groups last year threatened to stop similar marches by force. But this year Pakistani officials have beefed up security to protect the marchers. Pakistan is a conservative country where women often do not feel safe in public places because of open harassment.

In neighboring Afghanistan, since the Taliban takeover in 2021, the country has become the most repressive in the world for women and girls, the United Nations said Wednesday.

In a statement released Wednesday, the U.N. mission said that Afghanistan's new rulers have shown an almost "singular focus on imposing rules that leave most women and girls effectively trapped in their homes."

They have banned girls' education beyond sixth grade and barred women from public spaces such as parks and gyms. Women are also barred from working at national and international nongovernmental organizations and ordered to cover themselves from head to toe.

Roza Otunbayeva, special representative of the U.N. secretary-general and head of the mission to Afghanistan said that "it has been distressing to witness their methodical, deliberate, and systematic efforts to push Afghan women and girls out of the public sphere."

In other regions, major advances have been made for women in the areas of equality, reproduction rights, laws to try to eliminate gender and sexual violence, and moves toward equal pay, gender parity and shared domestic chores.

Spain on Tuesday passed a new Parity Law requiring that women — and men — make up at least 40% of the boards of directors of listed companies and private companies with more than 250 workers and 50 million euros in business. The same will also apply to Spain's Cabinet.

The bill also proposes to oblige political parties to have equality in their electoral lists, with names of men and women alternating.

Leftist governments have put women's rights in the vanguard over the past two decades with far-reaching laws on abortion, menstrual leave and improved maternity and paternity leave, among others.

But Tuesday also saw the current leftist coalition — with 14 women and nine men in its Cabinet — facing its toughest test in three years in power, with the two ruling parties at loggerheads over reforming their own pioneering sexual violence law that has inadvertently led to the reduction of sentences for over 700

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offenders and caused national outrage.

While many countries have made similar advances, especially in Europe, other like the United States, which ended the constitutional right to abortion last year, has seen restrictions return to many states in what is a major step backward, according to many women.

All-female ensemble set for broadcast of NBA game on ESPN

By PAT GRAHAM AP Sports Writer

On the court, it will be the Dallas Mavericks and New Orleans Pelicans. Taking center stage, an all-female ensemble that will produce the broadcast.

It's the second straight year ESPN has orchestrated an NBA game led by an all-female broadcast crew, with this version being held on International Women's Day. Beth Mowins and Doris Burke will call the action, with more than 70 women taking part in Wednesday's pregame and game coverage.

They'll fill the roles of analyst, commentators, producers, directors, graphic designers, statisticians and social media operators.

Really, though, it feels almost like any other day at the office for Malika Andrews.

"Because I see these women literally every day," Andrews, host of NBA Today, said in a phone interview on the amount of women contributing to the production. "You can hear and see their collective voices in this unique way. So it's like, 'Oh, all of my favorite people get to work on this one project. It's going to be awesome.'"

In addition to Mowins and Burke calling the game, Cassidy Hubbarth will serve as a sideline reporter. There will be a pregame panel, too, consisting of WNBA standout/commentator Chiney Ogwumike, reporter Ramona Shelburne and WNBA Coach of the Year Becky Hammon, with analyst Monica McNutt joining in as well. Andrews will host NBA Today and NBA Countdown from ESPN's production center in Los Angeles.

In the second game of the double-header — when the Los Angeles Clippers host the Toronto Raptors — reporter Ros Gold-Onwude will play a key role on the broadcast team.

"As a society, we're moving forward and listening better and uplifting women in a more meaningful way. But we still have progress to make," Andrews said. "We still have not had a woman who is a head coach in the NBA. I'm hopeful that those strides are going to happen in my lifetime.

"The women I work around inspire me and what I see in the world, the conversations that we're having, inspire me."

Same sentiment for Sara Gaiero, the coordinating producer who will oversee game production.

"Representation matters. If you see it, you can be it," Gaiero said. "To walk into a production truck, control room, media room and broadcast booth and see women in all of the chairs is a powerful sight. There was a time when you'd be the only woman in these rooms. Now, we have so many talented women making regular contributions to our NBA property and across our productions."

They follow in the NBA footsteps of pioneering female sports commentators/analysts. Iconic names who covered the league such as Cheryl Miller, the USC star turned analyst. Or Ann Meyers Drysdale, the UCLA standout who is a TV analyst for the Phoenix Suns as well as the Mercury.

They're all paving the way for the next generation.

"As much as this is a story that I hope makes little girls smile, I hope they also look up and say, 'They're there because they've earned it to be there. I can earn it to be there, too,'" Andrews said.

Meyers Drysdale doesn't look at this endeavor as breaking through any sort of glass ceiling. She's not really a fan of that particular description. It's too restrictive.

"I grew up in a generation where the sky was the limit," said Meyers Drysdale, whose broadcast career has also included covering the Summer Olympics. "Certainly there have been obstacles and adversity. But my parents were always like, 'Hey, you can do anything you want.'"

Meyers Drysdale tries to follow the work of females in broadcasting around the league. Women like Katy Winge, a reporter/host/analyst for the Denver Nuggets' TV network Altitude Sports. Or Lisa Byington, the play-by-play voice of the Milwaukee Bucks. Or Kayte Christensen, a commentator for the broadcast of the

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Sacramento Kings. Or Candace Parker, a two-time WNBA MVP who was an analyst at the NBA All-Star Game.

"It's wonderful to see because they've got a voice and there's confidence in who they are and the opportunity that they've been given," Meyers Drysdale explained. "I'm just so proud of their presentation and their work ethic and their confidence and ability to do what they're doing.

"They're all very impressive."

Pau Gasol gets emotional as Lakers retire his No. 16 jersey

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — When Pau Gasol joined the Los Angeles Lakers just over 15 years ago, the Spanish 7-footer banished his ego, redoubled his work ethic and immediately turned this team into contenders who eventually became champions.

Gasol and Kobe Bryant did it all together, and their numbers now hang side by side in the Lakers' arena.

The Lakers retired Gasol's No. 16 jersey Tuesday night, honoring the genteel big man who spent the best seasons of his 18-year NBA career with Bryant in Los Angeles. The Lakers reached three straight NBA Finals after Gasol's arrival in February 2008, winning championships in 2009 and 2010.

"I think I've done as good as I could to really embrace it and savor it, but tonight really exceeds any dream or expectation that I've had," Gasol said before the game while wearing one championship ring on each hand. "It means so much, and obviously with Kobe up there, it just adds something meaningful and powerful and sad and happy and painful and joyful. It's a lot of things."

Gasol's banner was unveiled during a halftime ceremony that began with Bryant's widow, Vanessa, introducing a video in which an excited Kobe said he was looking forward to the day when Gasol gave a speech at center court during his jersey retirement. Gasol choked up while watching the video and standing in that exact spot, wiping tears from his eyes before he spoke to the crowd.

"I'm just overwhelmed to see the faces here, all of you," Gasol said. "It's been my honor to wear this jersey, to play for this franchise and to help this team. ... I would have never in a million years believed a day like this could come. It just tells you to never say never. Just push yourself every day to be the best that you can be."

Gasol's versatile game complemented Bryant's scoring prowess perfectly when Gasol decided to be a supporting player to a fellow superstar, and the two also formed a deep off-court friendship that endured to Bryant's death in 2020.

Gasol thanked Vanessa Bryant during his speech: "Love you, sister. I'm proud to be your brother, and proud to be an uncle to your girls."

This 17-time NBA champion franchise typically only retires the numbers of players in the Hall of Fame, and Gasol is a first-time finalist for the honor this year with a strong chance of making the cut. Gasol made three of his six career All-Star teams during his time with Los Angeles while averaging 17.7 points and 9.9 rebounds per game.

"The excitement, the anticipation, the honor received, it's just so big that it's been hard to really take it in," Gasol said. "I have to keep reminding myself that it's a celebration. It's great. It's lovely. It's just great that you can experience this in your life."

The 42-year-old Gasol said he struggled to sleep over the past few days while he thought about the enormity of the Lakers' gesture amid the still-strong memories of his years on the West Coast. The team scheduled the ceremony for halftime of the Lakers' game against the Memphis Grizzlies.

Gasol chose Tuesday night for his Lakers jersey retirement for a very good reason: He played his first seven NBA seasons with the Grizzlies, his first team after he moved stateside in 2001.

Memphis traded Gasol to the Lakers in February 2008, and the deal transformed both franchises: While Gasol and Bryant immediately formed a dominant partnership, Memphis got a package that included Gasol's younger brother, Marc, who went on to have 11 largely excellent seasons with the Grizz.

Gasol's parents, his brothers Marc and Adrià, Vanessa Bryant and Lakers owner Jeanie Buss joined Gasol and his wife on the court.

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Gasol was only the second Spanish player in NBA history and the first to win a ring, and he believes his long, successful career contributed to erasing the stereotype of the "soft" European player. Gasol noted that three Europeans now are arguably the top three players in the league: Giannis Antetokounmpo, Nikola Jokic and Luka Doncic.

"I'm proud to see that," Gasol said. "That inspires not only European kids, but players across the world. Give yourself a chance if you really want it. It's been great to see the game grow globally."

Gasol's jersey represents the 13th number retired by the Lakers honoring 12 players. Bryant's early-career No. 8 and late-career No. 24 are both retired.

Global stocks fall amid fears about faster rate hikes

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Global shares were mostly lower Wednesday as investors fretted that the Federal Reserve might raise interest rates faster if pressure stays high on inflation.

France's CAC 40 shed 0.2% to 7,325.65 in early trading. Britain's FTSE 100 dipped 0.3% to 7,898.54. Germany's DAX inched down less than 0.1% to 15,555.97. U.S. shares were set to drift higher with Dow futures up 0.1% at 32,901.00. S&P 500 futures rose nearly 0.1% to 3,993.25.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 edged up 0.5% to finish at 28,444.19. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 slipped 0.8% to 7,307.80. South Korea's Kospi dropped 1.3% to 2,431.91.

Chinese shares sank after officials in Beijing announced plans for a regulatory shakeup. Hong Kong's Hang Seng tumbled 2.4% to 20,051.25, while the Shanghai Composite slipped less than 0.1% to 3,283.25. Oil prices fell.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell told lawmakers that the central bank would keep interest rates higher if need be to fight inflation.

"Asian shares were under pressure on Wednesday as global equities sold off after hawkish comments from Fed Chair Powell. He noted recent macro data, while possibly related to seasonal adjustments, suggest the Committee might have to raise rates higher than expected," said Anderson Alves at ActivTrades.

A Fed meeting later this month is expected to result in another rate hike. When Powell speaks at U.S. Congress again later in the day, traders will watch to see if he reinforces the hawkish rhetoric or tones it down, given the market reaction.

Higher rates can drag down inflation because they slow the economy, but they hurt prices for stocks and other investments. They also raise the risk of a recession later on.

Powell has confirmed some of those fears, saying the data mean "the ultimate level of interest rates is likely to be higher than previously anticipated." He also said in his testimony to a Senate committee that the Fed is ready to increase the pace of its hikes again if needed.

That would be a sharp turnaround after it had just slowed its pace of increases to 0.25 percentage points last month from earlier hikes of 0.50 and 0.75 points.

"If the totality of the data were to indicate that faster tightening is warranted, we would be prepared to increase the pace of rate hikes," Powell said. "Restoring price stability will likely require that we maintain a restrictive stance of monetary policy for some time."

After sitting at virtually unchanged levels just before Powell's testimony, stocks fell immediately afterward.

"This is the market coming back to realistic expectations," said Megan Horneman, chief investment officer at Verdence Capital Advisors. "I think it's going to continue to wash out some of the excesses in the market."

The U.S. government's monthly jobs report, due Friday, will provide an update on wages. The Fed's fear is that too-strong gains could push prices higher.

The challenge for the market has been that the economy has actually been too strong, despite all the rate increases the Fed has thrown at it. That suggests a recession may not be looming but also likely means rates will need to stay higher for longer, raising risks of a deeper recession down the line.

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In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude lost 33 cents to \$77.25 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent crude, the international standard, fell 22 cents to \$83.07 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar rose to 137.52 Japanese yen from 137.07 yen. The euro cost \$1.0549, down from \$1.0551.

From marketing to design, brands adopt AI tools despite risk

By MATT O'BRIEN and HALELUYA HADERO AP Technology Writers

Even if you haven't tried artificial intelligence tools that can write essays and poems or conjure new images on command, chances are the companies that make your household products are already starting to do so.

Mattel has put the AI image generator DALL-E to work by having it come up with ideas for new Hot Wheels toy cars. Used vehicle seller CarMax is summarizing thousands of customer reviews with the same "generative" AI technology that powers the popular chatbot ChatGPT.

Meanwhile, Snapchat is bringing a chatbot to its messaging service. And the grocery delivery company Instacart is integrating ChatGPT to answer customers' food questions.

Coca-Cola plans to use generative AI to help create new marketing content. And while the company hasn't detailed exactly how it plans to deploy the technology, the move reflects the growing pressure on businesses to harness tools that many of their employees and consumers are already trying on their own.

"We must embrace the risks," said Coca-Cola CEO James Quincey in a recent video announcing a partnership with startup OpenAI — maker of both DALL-E and ChatGPT — through an alliance led by the consulting firm Bain. "We need to embrace those risks intelligently, experiment, build on those experiments, drive scale, but not taking those risks is a hopeless point of view to start from."

Indeed, some AI experts warn that businesses should carefully consider potential harms to customers, society and their own reputations before rushing to embrace ChatGPT and similar products in the workplace.

"I want people to think deeply before deploying this technology," said Claire Leibowicz of The Partnership on AI, a nonprofit group founded and sponsored by the major tech providers that recently released a set of recommendations for companies producing AI-generated synthetic imagery, audio and other media. "They should play around and tinker, but we should also think, what purpose are these tools serving in the first place?"

Some companies have been experimenting with AI for a while. Mattel revealed its use of OpenAI's image generator in October as a client of Microsoft, which has a partnership with OpenAI that enables it to integrate its technology into Microsoft's cloud computing platform.

But it wasn't until the November 30 release of OpenAI's ChatGPT, a free public tool, that widespread interest in generative AI tools began seeping into workplaces and executive suites.

"ChatGPT really sort of brought it home how powerful they were," said Eric Boyd, a Microsoft executive who leads its AI platform. "That's changed the conversation in a lot of people's minds where they really get it on a deeper level. My kids use it and my parents use it."

There is reason for caution, however. While text generators like ChatGPT and Microsoft's Bing chatbot can make the process of writing emails, presentations and marketing pitches faster and easier, they also have a tendency to confidently present misinformation as fact. Image generators trained on a huge trove of digital art and photography have raised copyright concerns from the original creators of those works.

"For companies that are really in the creative industry, if they want to make sure that they have copyright protection for those models, that's still an open question," said attorney Anna Gressel of the law firm Debevoise & Plimpton, which advises businesses on how to use AI.

A safer use has been thinking of the tools as a brainstorming "thought partner" that won't produce the final product, Gressel said.

"It helps create mock ups that then are going to be turned by a human into something that is more concrete," she said.

And that also helps ensure that humans don't get replaced by AI. Forrester analyst Rowan Curran said

the tools should speed up some of the “nitty-gritty” of office tasks — much like previous innovations such as word processors and spell checkers — rather than putting people out of work, as some fear.

“Ultimately it’s part of the workflow,” Curran said. “It’s not like we’re talking about having a large language model just generate an entire marketing campaign and have that launch without expert senior marketers and all kinds of other controls.”

For consumer-facing chatbots getting integrated into smartphone apps, it gets a little trickier, Curran said, with a need for guardrails around technology that can respond to users’ questions in unexpected ways.

Public awareness fueled growing competition between cloud computing providers Microsoft, Amazon and Google, which sell their services to big organizations and have the massive computing power needed to train and operate AI models. Microsoft announced earlier this year it was investing billions more dollars into its partnership with OpenAI, though it also competes with the startup as a direct provider of AI tools.

Google, which pioneered advancements in generative AI but has been cautious about introducing them to the public, is now playing catch up to capture its commercial possibilities including an upcoming Bard chatbot. Facebook parent Meta, another AI research leader, builds similar technology but doesn’t sell it to businesses in the same way as its big tech peers.

Amazon has taken a more muted tone, but makes its ambitions clear through its partnerships — most recently an expanded collaboration between its cloud computing division AWS and the startup Hugging Face, maker of a ChatGPT rival called Bloom.

Hugging Face decided to double down on its Amazon partnership after seeing the explosion of demand for generative AI products, said Clement Delangue, the startup’s co-founder and CEO. But Delangue contrasted his approach with competitors such as OpenAI, which doesn’t disclose its code and datasets.

Hugging Face hosts a platform that allows developers to share open-source AI models for text, image and audio tools, which can lay the foundation for building different products. That transparency is “really important because that’s the way for regulators, for example, to understand these models and be able to regulate,” he said.

It is also a way for “underrepresented people to understand where the biases can be (and) how the models have been trained,” so that the bias can be mitigated, Delangue said.

Taiwan suspects Chinese ships cut islands’ internet cables

By HUIZHONG WU and JOHNSON LAI Associated Press

NANGAN, Taiwan (AP) — In the past month, bed and breakfast owner Chen Yu-lin had to tell his guests he couldn’t provide them with the internet.

Others living on Matsu, one of Taiwan’s outlying islands closer to neighboring China, had to struggle with paying electricity bills, making a doctor’s appointment or receiving a package.

For connecting to the outside world, Matsu’s 14,000 residents rely on two submarine internet cables leading to Taiwan’s main island. The National Communications Commission, citing the island’s telecom service, blamed two Chinese ships for cutting the cables. It said a Chinese fishing vessel is suspected of severing the first cable some 50 kilometers (31 miles) out at sea. Six days later, on Feb. 8, a Chinese cargo ship cut the second, NCC said.

Taiwan’s government stopped short of calling it a deliberate act on the part of Beijing, and there was no direct evidence to show the Chinese ships were responsible.

The islanders in the meantime were forced to hook up to a limited internet via microwave radio transmission, a more mature technology, as backup. It means one could wait hours to send a text. Calls would drop, and videos were unwatchable.

“A lot of tourists would cancel their booking because there’s no internet. Nowadays, the internet plays a very large role in people’s lives,” said Chen, who lives in Beigan, one of Matsu’s main residential islands.

Apart from disrupting lives, the loss of the internet cables, seemingly innocuous, has huge implications for national security.

As the full-scale invasion of Ukraine has shown, Russia has made taking out internet infrastructure one of

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the key parts of its strategy. Some experts suspect China may have cut the cables deliberately as part of its harassment of the self-ruled island it considers part of its territory, to be reunited by force if necessary.

China regularly sends warplanes and navy ships toward Taiwan as part of tactics to intimidate the island's democratic government. Concerns about China's invasion, and Taiwan's preparedness to withstand it, have increased since the war in Ukraine.

The cables had been cut a total of 27 times in the past five years, but it was unclear which country the vessels hailed from, based on data from Chunghwa Telecom.

Taiwan's coast guard gave chase to the fishing vessel that cut the first cable on Feb. 2, but it went back to Chinese waters, according to an official who was briefed on the incident and was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly. Authorities found two Chinese ships in the area where the cables were cut, based on automated identification system data, similar to GPS, which shows a vessel's location.

"We can't rule out that China destroyed these on purpose," said Su Tzu-yun, a defense expert at the government think tank, Institute for National Defense and Security Research, citing a research that only China and Russia had the technical capabilities to do this. "Taiwan needs to invest more resources in repairing and protecting the cables."

Internet cables, which can be anywhere between 20 millimeters to 30 millimeters (0.79 inches to 1.18 inches) wide, are encased in steel armor in shallow waters where they're more likely to run into ships. Despite the protection, cables can get cut quite easily by ships and their anchors, or fishing boats using steel nets.

Even so, "this level of breakage is highly unusual for a cable, even in the shallow waters of the Taiwan Strait," said Geoff Huston, chief scientist at Asia Pacific Network Information Centre, a non-profit that manages and distributes Internet resources like IP addresses for the region.

Without a stable internet, coffee shop owner Chiu Sih-chi said seeing the doctor for his toddler son's cold became a hassle because first they had to visit the hospital to just get an appointment.

A breakfast shop owner said she lost thousands of dollars in the past few weeks because she usually takes online orders. Customers would come to her stall expecting the food to be ready when she hadn't even seen their messages.

Faced with unusual difficulties, Matsu residents came up with all sorts of ways to organize their lives.

One couple planned to deal with the coming peak season by having one person stay in Taiwan to access their reservation system and passing the information on to the other via text messages. Wife Lin Hsian-wen extended her vacation in Taiwan during the off-season when she heard the internet back home wasn't working and is returning to Matsu later in the week.

Some enterprising residents went across to the other shore to buy SIM cards from Chinese telecoms, though those only work well in the spots closer to the Chinese coast, which is only 10 kilometers (6.21 miles) away at its closest point.

Others, like the bed and breakfast owner Tsao Li-yu, would go to Chunghwa Telecom's office to use a Wi-Fi hot spot the company had set up for locals to use in the meantime.

"I was going to work at (Chunghwa Telecom)," Tsao joked.

Chunghwa had set up microwave transmission as backup for the residents. Broadcast from Yangmingshan, a mountain just outside of Taipei, Taiwan's capital, the relay beams the signals some 200 kilometers (124 miles) across to Matsu. Since Sunday, speeds were noticeably faster, residents said.

Wang Chung Ming, the head of Lienchiang County, as the Matsu islands are officially called, said he and the legislator from Matsu went to Taipei shortly after the internet broke down to ask for help, and was told they would get priority in any future internet backup plans.

Taiwan's Ministry of Digital Affairs publicly asked for bids from low-Earth orbit satellite operators to provide the internet in a backup plan, after seeing Russia's cyberattacks in the invasion of Ukraine, the head of the ministry, Audrey Tang, told The Washington Post last fall. Yet, the plan remains stalled as a law in Taiwan requires the providers to be at least 51% owned by a domestic shareholder.

A spokesperson for the Digital Ministry directed questions about the progress of backup plans to the

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National Communications Commission. NCC said it will install a surveillance system for the undersea cables, while relying on microwave transmission as a backup option.

Many Pacific island nations, before they started using internet cables, depended on satellites — and some still do — as backup, said Jonathan Brewer, a telecommunications consultant from New Zealand who works across Asia and the Pacific.

There's also the question of cost. Repairing the cables is expensive, with an early estimate of \$30 million New Taiwan Dollars (\$1 million) for the work of the ships alone.

"The Chinese boats that damaged the cables should be held accountable and pay compensation for the highly expensive repairs," said Wen Lii, the head of the Matsu chapter of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party.

Wang, the head of Lienchiang County, said he had mentioned the cables on a recent visit to China, where he had met an executive from China Mobile. They offered to send technicians to help. But compensation, he said, will require providing hard proof on who did it.

China's Taiwan Affairs Office did not respond to a faxed request for comment.

For now, the only thing residents can do is wait. The earliest cable-laying ships can come is April 20, because there are a limited number of vessels that can do the job.

A month without functional internet has its upsides too. Chen Yu-lin, the bed and breakfast owner, has felt more at peace.

It was hard in the first week, but Chen quickly got used to it. "From a life perspective, I think it's much more comfortable because you get fewer calls," he said, adding he was spending more time with his son, who usually is playing games online.

At a web cafe where off-duty soldiers were playing offline games, the effect was the same.

"Our relationships have become a bit closer," said one soldier who only gave his first name, Samuel. "Because normally when there's internet, everyone keeps to themselves, and now we're more connected."

China accuses Washington of trying to block its development

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Is the United States out to sabotage China? Chinese leaders think so.

President Xi Jinping accused Washington this week of trying to isolate his country and hold back its development. That reflects the ruling Communist Party's growing frustration that its pursuit of prosperity and global influence is threatened by U.S. restrictions on access to technology, its support for Taiwan and other moves seen by Beijing as hostile.

Xi, China's most powerful leader in decades, tries to appear to be above problems and usually makes blandly positive public comments. That made his complaint Monday all the more striking. Xi said a U.S.-led campaign of "containment and suppression" of China has "brought unprecedented, severe challenges." He called on the public to "dare to fight."

On Tuesday, Foreign Minister Qin Gang sharpened the warning, saying Washington faces possible "conflict and confrontation" if it fails to change course.

"The foreign minister is speaking on behalf of a widely held view that the United States is coming after China and they have to defend themselves," said John Delury, an international relations specialist at Yonsei University in Seoul.

China is hardly the only government to fume at Washington's dominance of global strategic and economic affairs. But Chinese leaders see the United States as making extra effort to thwart Beijing as a challenger for regional and possibly global leadership.

The ruling party wants to restore China's historic role as a political and cultural leader, raise incomes by transforming the country into an inventor of technology, and unite what it considers the Chinese motherland by taking control of Taiwan, the self-ruled island democracy that Beijing claims as part of its territory.

Beijing sees those as positive goals, but American officials see them as threats. They say Chinese development plans are based at least in part on stealing or pressuring foreign companies to hand over

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technology. Some warn Chinese competition might erode U.S. industrial dominance and incomes.

Washington has set back Beijing's plans by putting Chinese companies including its first global tech brand, Huawei, on a blacklist that limits access to processor chips and other technology. That crippled Huawei's smartphone brand, once one of the world's biggest. American officials are lobbying European and other allies to avoid Huawei equipment when they upgrade phone networks.

Washington cites security fears, but Beijing says that is an excuse to hurt its fledgling competitors.

The two governments have the world's biggest trading relationship and common interests in combating climate change and other problems. But relations are strained over Taiwan, Beijing's treatment of Hong Kong and mostly Muslim ethnic minorities, and its refusal to criticize or isolate Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

The official Chinese view has soured following an uptick when Xi met U.S. President Joe Biden in November in Indonesia, said Shi Yinhong, an international relations specialist at Renmin University in Beijing. He noted that in the five months since then, Washington approved more weapons sales to Taiwan, criticized Beijing's stance on Ukraine and put more Chinese companies on export watchlists, all of which China saw as hostile.

Xi and Qin spoke in a "dramatic way" this week, but "the essence of what they said is China's long-term stance," Shi said. The leadership believes "the United States has implemented almost all around, drastic and desperate containment of China in all respects, especially in strategic and military fields."

"The risk of military conflict between China and the United States is getting bigger," Shi said.

A State Department spokesperson, Ned Price, said Washington wants to "coexist responsibly" within the global trade and political system and denied the U.S. government wants to suppress China.

"This is not about containing China. This is not about suppressing China. This is not about holding China back," Price said in Washington. "We want to have that constructive competition that is fair" and "doesn't veer into that conflict."

The United States formed a strategic group, the Quad, with Japan, Australia and India in response to concern about China and its claim to vast tracts of sea that are busy shipping lanes. They insist the group doesn't focus on any one country, but its official statements are about territorial claims and other issues on which they have disputes with Beijing.

The latest change in tone follows acrimonious exchanges over a Chinese balloon that was shot down after passing over North America. Its electronics and other equipment are being examined by the FBI.

Qin, the foreign minister is "trying to position China as a global force for moderation and for peace" in front of foreign audiences and say "it's the Americans who are blowing things out of proportion," Delury said.

Xi's government is especially irritated by displays of support by American and other Western legislators for Taiwan, which split with China in 1949 after a civil war.

Taiwan never has been part of the People's Republic of China, but the Communist Party says the island of 22 million people must unite with the mainland, by force if necessary.

Washington is obligated by federal law to see that Taiwan has the weapons to defend itself and has sold it fighter jets and missiles. Chinese leaders complain that encourages Taiwanese politicians who might want to resist unification and possibly declare formal independence, a step Beijing says would lead to war.

Premier Li Keqiang, who is due to step down as China's No. 2 leader this month, called on Sunday for "peaceful reunification." But Xi's government also has stepped up efforts to intimidate the island by flying fighter jets and firing missiles into the sea nearby.

The latest downturn is "testament to the real degradation" of U.S.-Chinese relations, which "never had much trust," said Drew Thompson, a fellow at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore.

Chinese leaders "consider any sort of discussion on strategic issues as sensitive and out of bounds," which leads to "heightened risk of miscalculation," Thompson said.

"They believe the U.S. is a hegemon that seeks to undermine the Communist Party and its legitimacy, and they have ample evidence of that," he said. "But should perceptions and the balance of interests change,

they could just as easily believe the U.S. is a partner for achieving the party's objectives."

Battle for Bakhmut takes center stage in war in Ukraine

By The Associated Press undefined

The six-month battle for the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut has been the longest and bloodiest fight of the war so far.

Little known outside Ukraine before the Russian invasion, Bakhmut has become a symbol of the country's fortitude and perseverance in the face of the Kremlin's onslaught.

The Ukrainian leadership vowed again this week to keep defending the city, but some observers have warned that holding on to it could be too dangerous and costly.

Here is a look at Bakhmut, the battle and its possible consequences.

WHAT KIND OF CITY IS BAKHMUT?

Bakhmut, which had a prewar population of more than 70,000, was an important center for salt and gypsum mining in the Donetsk region of the country's industrial heartland known as the Donbas.

The city was also known for its sparkling wine production in historic underground caves. Its broad tree-lined avenues, lush parks and stately downtown with imposing late 19th century buildings made it a popular tourist attraction.

When a separatist rebellion engulfed the Donbas in April 2014, weeks after Moscow's illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, Russia-backed separatists won control of the city but lost it a few months later.

HOW DID THE FIGHTING EVOLVE?

Russian troops first attempted to recapture Bakhmut in early August but were pushed back.

The fighting abated in the following months as the Russian military faced Ukrainian counteroffensives in the east and the south, but it resumed at full pace late last year. In January, the Russians captured the salt-mining town of Soledar just a few kilometers (miles) north of Bakhmut and advanced to the city's suburbs.

The relentless Russian bombardment has reduced Bakhmut to a smoldering wasteland with few buildings still standing. Russian and Ukrainian soldiers have fought ferocious house-to-house battles in the ruins.

Soldiers from Russia's private Wagner Group contractor have spearheaded the offensive, marching on "the corpses of their own troops" as Ukrainian officials put it. By the end of February, the Russians approached the only highway leading out of the city and targeted it with artillery, forcing Ukrainian defenders to rely increasingly on country roads, which are hard to use before the ground dries.

WHAT DO UKRAINIAN AND RUSSIAN OFFICIALS SAY ABOUT THE BATTLE?

Ukrainian authorities have hailed the city as the invincible "fortress Bakhmut" that has destroyed waves of Russian assailants.

As Russian pincers were closing on the city, a presidential aide warned last week that the military could "strategically pull back" if needed. But on Monday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his top generals decided that the army will keep defending Bakhmut and reinforce its troops there.

For the Kremlin, capturing Bakhmut is essential for achieving its stated goal of taking full control of Donetsk, one of the four Ukrainian regions that Moscow illegally annexed in September.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Tuesday that the seizure of Bakhmut would allow Russia to press its offensive deeper into the region.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the rogue millionaire who owns the Wagner Group, charged that his forces were destroying the best Ukrainian units in Bakhmut to prevent them from launching attacks elsewhere.

At the same time, he harshly criticized the Russian Defense Ministry for failing to provide Wagner with ammunition in comments that reflected his longtime tensions with the top military brass and exposed problems that could slow down the Russian offensive.

WHAT DO EXPERTS SAY?

Military experts note that Ukraine has turned Bakhmut into a meat grinder for Russia's most capable forces.

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"It has achieved its aim as effectively being the anvil on which so many Russian lives have been broken," Lord Richard Dannatt, the former chief of the general staff of the British armed forces, said on Sky News.

Phillips P. O'Brien, professor of strategic studies at the University of St Andrews, said the battle for Bakhmut "confirms that the Russian army is still struggling with basic operations."

He noted that the Kremlin's continuing emphasis on land grabs regardless of losses means that "Russian strategic aims are bleeding the Russian army greatly."

While Ukrainian and Western officials pointed out that Russian combat losses were much higher than Ukrainian, some observers argued that the defense of Bakhmut was distracting Ukrainian resources that could be used in a planned counteroffensive later in the spring.

Michael Kofman, director of Russia studies at CAN, a Washington-based think tank, observed that the Ukrainian defenders "achieved a great deal, expending Russian manpower and ammunition," but added that it could be wise for Ukraine to save its forces for future offensive operations.

"Strategies can reach points of diminishing returns," and given that Ukraine "is trying to husband resources for an offensive, it could impede the success of a more important operation," he said.

WHAT COULD HAPPEN NEXT?

Ukrainian and Western officials emphasize that a Ukrainian retreat from Bakhmut will not have strategic significance or change the course of the conflict.

The Ukrainian military has already strengthened defensive lines west of Bakhmut to block the Russian advance if Ukrainian troops finally retreat from the city. The nearby town of Chasiv Yar that sits on a hill just a few kilometers west could become the next bulwark against the Russians. Further west are Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, the heavily fortified Ukrainian strongholds in Donetsk.

And even as the Russian military tries to pursue its offensive in Donetsk, it needs to keep large contingents in other sections of the Donbas and in the southern Zaporizhzhia region where Ukrainian forces are widely expected to launch their next counteroffensive.

Russian Wagner Group chief claims extended gains in Bakhmut

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The owner of Russia's Wagner Group military company claimed Wednesday that his troops have extended their gains in the key Ukrainian stronghold of Bakhmut as fierce fighting continues in the war's longest battle.

Yevgeny Prigozhin said Wagner troops have taken full control of the eastern part of Bakhmut. He claimed that they now control all districts east of the Bakhmutka River that crosses the city in the eastern Donetsk region. The center of Bakhmut is located west of the river.

Neither Russian nor Ukrainian officials commented on Prigozhin's claim. The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think-tank that closely monitors the fighting in Ukraine, said in its latest analysis that "Russian forces have likely captured the eastern part of Bakhmut, east of the Bakhmutka River, following a controlled Ukrainian withdrawal from eastern Bakhmut as of March 7."

The Wagner Group has spearheaded the Russian offensive in Bakhmut that has lasted for six months and reduced the city with a prewar population of more than 70,000 to a smoldering wasteland.

Russian troops have enveloped the city from three sides, leaving only a narrow corridor leading west. The only highway west has been targeted by Russian artillery fire, forcing Ukrainian forces defending the city to rely increasingly on country roads, which are hard to use before the muddy ground dries.

Ukrainian authorities have hailed the defenders of the "fortress Bakhmut," and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed Monday not to retreat from Bakhmut after chairing a meeting with his top generals.

For the Kremlin, capturing Bakhmut is essential for achieving its stated goal of taking control of the whole of Donetsk, one of the four Ukrainian regions that Moscow illegally annexed in September.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Tuesday that the seizure of Bakhmut would allow Russia to press its offensive deeper into the region.

In a blustery video statement recorded near a landmark World War II T-34 tank monument from Bakhmut,

Prigozhin said that the capture of the city would allow the Russian military to exploit the success and push deeper into the Donbas — the industrial region of eastern Ukraine that Russia claims — to make “the entire world shudder.”

But Western officials have emphasized that even if Ukrainian troops eventually retreat from Bakhmut, its capture will not have strategic significance or change the course of the conflict.

The Ukrainian military has already strengthened defensive lines west of Bakhmut to block the Russian advance, including in the nearby town of Chasiv Yar that sits on a hill a few kilometers west. Further west are Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, the heavily fortified Ukrainian strongholds in Donetsk.

The ISW observed that, in terms of the wider war, Russian forces are unlikely to capitalize on the possible capture of Bakhmut where they have relied on small units for urban combat.

“The continuing devolution of Russian force structure towards small assault detachments using simplified tactics, combined with mounting losses among the most effective Russian troops, will likely greatly limit the ability of Russian forces to properly exploit any paths of advance opened by the capture of Bakhmut,” the ISW said.

Russia is also likely short of the mechanized forces it would need to push on from Bakhmut, it added.

As the fighting raged in the east, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres arrived in the Ukrainian capital early Wednesday. The U.N. said that he is scheduled to meet with Zelenskyy later in the day “to discuss the continuation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative in all its aspects, as well as other pertinent issues.”

That deal allows Ukraine to export grain from its Black Sea ports and permits Russia to export food and fertilizers.

UN: Afghanistan is world’s most repressive country for women

By RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the country has become the most repressive in the world for women and girls, deprived of many of their basic rights, the United Nations said Wednesday.

In a statement released on the International Women’s Day, the U.N. mission said that Afghanistan’s new rulers have shown an almost “singular focus on imposing rules that leave most women and girls effectively trapped in their homes.”

Despite initial promises of a more moderate stance, the Taliban have imposed harsh measures since seizing power in August 2021 as U.S. and NATO forces were in the final weeks of their pullout from Afghanistan after two decades of war.

They have banned girls’ education beyond sixth grade and women from public spaces such as parks and gyms. Women are also barred from working at national and international nongovernmental organizations and ordered to cover themselves from head to toe.

“Afghanistan under the Taliban remains the most repressive country in the world regarding women’s rights,” said Roza Otunbayeva, special representative of the U.N. secretary-general and head of the mission to Afghanistan.

“It has been distressing to witness their methodical, deliberate, and systematic efforts to push Afghan women and girls out of the public sphere,” she added.

The restrictions, especially the bans on education and NGO work, have drawn fierce international condemnation. But the Taliban have shown no signs of backing down, claiming the bans are temporary suspensions in place allegedly because women were not wearing the Islamic headscarf, or hijab, correctly and because gender segregation rules were not being followed.

As for the ban on university education, the Taliban government has said that some of the subjects being taught were not in line with Afghan and Islamic values.

“Confining half of the country’s population to their homes in one of the world’s largest humanitarian and economic crises is a colossal act of national self-harm,” Otunbayeva also said.

"It will condemn not only women and girls, but all Afghans, to poverty and aid-dependency for generations to come," she said. "It will further isolate Afghanistan from its own citizens and from the rest of the world."

At a carpet factory in Kabul, women who were former government employees, high school or university students now spend their days weaving carpets.

"We all live like prisoners, we feel that we are caught in a cage," said Hafiza, 22, who goes only by her first name and who used to be a first-year law student before the Taliban banned women from attending classes at her university. "The worst situation is when your dreams are shattered, and you are punished for being a woman."

The U.N. mission to Afghanistan also said it has recorded an almost constant stream of discriminatory edicts and measures against women since the Taliban takeover — women's right to travel or work outside the confines of their home and access to spaces is largely restricted, and they have also been excluded from all levels of public decision-making.

"The implications of the harm the Taliban are inflicting on their own citizens goes beyond women and girls," said Alison Davidian, the special representative for U.N. Women in Afghanistan.

No officials from the Taliban-led government was immediately available for comment.

At the carpet factory, 18-years-old Shahida, who also uses only one name, said she was in 10th grade at one of Kabul high schools when her education was cut short.

"We just demand from the (Taliban) government to reopen schools and educational centers for us and give us our rights," she said.

Ahead of the International Women's Day, about 200 Afghan female small business owners put together an exhibition of their products in Kabul. Most complained of losing business since the Taliban takeover.

"I don't expect Taliban to respect women's rights," said one of them, Tamkin Rahimi. "Women here cannot practice (their) rights and celebrate Women's Day, because we cannot go to school, university or go to work, so I think we don't have any day to celebrate."

The U.N. Security Council was to meet later Wednesday with Otunbayeva and women representatives from Afghan civil society groups.

According to the statement, 11.6 million Afghan women and girls are in need of humanitarian assistance. However, the Taliban are further undermining the international aid effort through their ban on women working for NGOs.

The flowers of war: Ukraine smith turns guns, ammo into art

A blacksmith in the Russian-controlled eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk is practically beating swords into ploughshares, and turning one man's trash into treasures. Viktor Mikhalev takes weapons and ammunition and produces what he calls the flowers of war.

Mikhalev, who trained as a welder, lives and works in a house whose fence and door are decorated with forged flowers and grapes. In his workshop are piles of half-burnt machine guns and shells from the war's front line. Friends and acquaintances bring them as raw material for his art.

Donetsk, the center of Ukraine's industrial heartland of the Donbas, has been engulfed by fighting ever since the Moscow-backed separatist rebellion erupted in April 2014, weeks after Russia's illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

The Kremlin has made capturing the entire region a key goal of its invasion that began a year ago, and it illegally annexed Donetsk along with three other regions in eastern and southern Ukraine in September, declaring them part of Russia.

Fierce fighting has focused on the city of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region, and the city of Donetsk itself also has been frequently hit by shelling.

The smell of iron and paint permeates Mikhalev's workshop, also decorated from floor to ceiling with dozens of religious icons. He makes the art as a keepsake, a souvenir of the war in eastern Ukraine.

"Real flowers will not last long, and my roses will become a reminder for a long memory," the blacksmith says.

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He began the project when a friend brought him broken machine guns. A month later, he exhibited his war art in a Donetsk museum. Since then, he's constantly been making what he calls "flowers of war." In addition, he constructs stands for writing pens from parts of a grenade launcher and a cartridge case.

Review: 'Scream VI' goes to the big city and strikes out

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

In "Scream VI," the psychotic, knife-wielding serial killer known as Ghostface is set loose on the streets of New York City. Yawn.

The former terror of the fictional California town of Woodsboro has made the cross-country trip to the City That Never Sleeps, bringing his creepy mask, black cloak and impressive supply of daggers. But he's lost in the big city, a slasher made small in his new playground.

No disrespect to Mr. Stabby-Stabby, but New York is where you get screamed at by a deranged hot dog vendor, have fistfights over midtown parking, pay \$8 for a pack of gum and find approximately six public bathrooms for 8 million people. Ghostface, dude, up your scare game in the Big Apple. This is the city where Pizza Rat lives. This is a city where middle schoolers have nunchucks.

Despite the change of scenery, "Scream VI" is less a sequel and more a stutter-step, a half-movie with some very satisfying stabbings but no real progress or even movement. It's like treading water in gore. And to fully enjoy this "sequel to the requel," you need to have watched most of the others.

The four main survivors from the fifth "Scream" are all here a year later — the Carpenter sisters, Sam and Tara (Melissa Barrera and Jenna Ortega) and the smug brother-and-sister duo played by Mason Gooding and Jasmin Savoy Brown. They dub themselves the Core Four. "Survivors got to stick together," says the brother.

The same directing team of Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett return, as well as the writers James Vanderbilt and Guy Busick, who this time layer in some critiques of social media and fame. Courteney Cox is back, too, the last original cast member — or "a legacy," as she's called — to appear in the franchise. That may not be such a boastable thing.

Sam Carpenter is firmly in the crosshairs of Ghostface — or more than one Ghostface if the pattern persists — and trying to escape her heritage (and notoriety) as the child of an earlier serial killer. Bodies start falling quick. "This isn't your fault, Sam," says her sister. "But it is," replies Sam. And there are some disturbing signs that a latent killer lurks in her heart, too.

The filmmakers have picked quite a canvas — and wasted it. Unlike the "John Wick" franchise, the folks at "Scream VI" seem overawed by the city they've landed in. We expected Ghostface to slice Elmos in Times Square. We wanted finance bros in puffy vests and Brooklyn hipsters with weird facial hair to bleed. We wanted smugly rich Upper East Siders with tiny dogs to get splattered. Instead, the city seems to humble Ghostface, making him just another easy-to-ignore tourist overpaying for knock-off purses on the street.

There are fight scenes in a bodega and in a luxury apartment on the Upper West Side, but perhaps the best New York sequence is on a crowded subway train, where Ghostface is stalking in plain sight. The film is set around Halloween and so the train is packed with creepy dudes, tweaked-out college kids and masked marauders — in other words, a regular Tuesday. Anyone who has ridden the New York City subway in the past three years wouldn't even flinch at Ghostface. They might even cough up a dollar for him to go away.

The sequel sticks with the formula of folding in on itself, mocking in a meta way the horror conventions it itself helped build. "We're in a franchise!" one of the Core Four explains and, indeed, "Scream VI" opens with a film professor yammering on about cliched movie tropes and ends with fight-for-your-lives slash-a-thon at a disused movie theater. And so at the conclusion, we must limp on to the next sequel, with no end in sight, and hearing the city loudly mocking anyone foolish enough to try to come and scare it.

"Scream VI," a Paramount Pictures release that hits theaters on Friday, is rated R for "strong bloody violence, language throughout, brief drug use." Running time: 123 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four. ____

MPAA definition of R: Restricted. Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian. ____

Online: <https://www.screammovie.com>

As bourbon booms, thirst for rare brands breeds skullduggery

By ANDREW SELSKY and DAMIAN DOVARGANES Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Buttery, smooth, oaky. These are characteristics of the best bourbons, and a growing cult of aficionados is willing to pay an astonishing amount of money for these increasingly scarce premium American spirits — and even bend or break laws.

Premium spirits have always been expensive and sought-after. But a surge in interest in high-end bourbon has made finding that elusive bottle even more difficult. Distillers have upped production to try to meet increased demand, but before the whiskey reaches stores and bars, it must age for years and even decades. Scarcity has changed what some fans are willing to do to obtain the most sought-after bourbon.

In Oregon, a criminal investigation is under way after an internal probe concluded several state liquor officials used their clout to obtain scarce bourbons, including the holy grail for bourbon fanatics: Pappy Van Winkle 23-year-old, which can sell for tens of thousands of dollars on resale markets. That brand is so popular that it found itself at the center of criminal investigations in at least three other states, from Virginia to Pennsylvania to Kentucky.

The cases underscore how demand has reached a fever pitch. A limited number of Pappy Van Winkle 23-year, produced by Old Rip Van Winkle Distillery of Frankfort, Kentucky, goes to each state. In 2022, Oregon received just 33 bottles.

"The average person cannot get good bottles," said Cody Walding, a bourbon aficionado from Houston who has been on the hunt for Buffalo Trace Distillery's five-bottle Antique Collection. He hasn't been able to find any despite making connections with liquor store managers. He believes he's years away from success.

"Like, to be able to get Pappy Van Winkle or Buffalo Trace Antique Collection, unless you're basically best friends with a store manager, I don't even think it's possible to get those," he said.

In a Los Angeles bar that Walding visited last week, one shot of Pappy 23-year cost \$200.

Supplier sales for American whiskey — which includes bourbon, Tennessee whiskey and rye — rose 10.5% last year, reaching \$5.1 billion, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States. Revenues for makers of super-premium American whiskey grew 141% over the past five years.

In Oregon, the price of a bottle of Pappy 23-year-old bourbon is set by the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission at \$329.95. But finding Pappy 23-year-old on a store shelf would be almost as hard as finding a mythical Sasquatch in Oregon's forests.

The commission says that of last year's allocation of Pappy 23-year-old, 25 bottles went to bars, restaurants and/or liquor stores, three were reserved as safety stock to replace any damaged product and five went to "chance to purchase," a lottery started in 2018. The odds of winning Pappy 23-year-old were 1 in 4,150.

Utah and Pennsylvania are among other states that also use lotteries for coveted liquor. Two men in Pennsylvania each bought a bottle of Pappy Van Winkle after winning the liquor lottery in different years. They tried to sell their bottles on Craigslist, but undercover officers posing as buyers nailed them for selling liquor without a license.

In Virginia, an employee of the state's Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority downloaded confidential information about which state-run liquor shops would be receiving Pappy Van Winkle and other rare bourbons. An accomplice then sold the intel to Facebook groups of bourbon fans. In September, the now-former employee pleaded guilty to felony computer trespass, received a suspended prison sentence and a fine, and was banned from all Virginia liquor stores.

In Kentucky, an employee of Buffalo Trace Distillery was arrested in 2015 for stealing bourbon, including Pappy, over several years and selling it. The caper became part of "Heist," a Netflix miniseries, in 2021.

Bourbon, in particular, has a rich American heritage. It's been around since before Kentucky became a state in 1792 and is where the vast majority of bourbon comes from. In 1964, Congress declared bourbon

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"a distinctive product of the United States," barring whiskey produced in other countries from being labeled as bourbon. Today, some of the best-known Kentucky bourbon distilleries are foreign-owned.

In the 1960s and '70s, bourbon had a reputation as a cheap drink. Then came a change: Targeting Japan, Kentucky distillers developed single-barrel and small batch versions in the 1980s and 1990s, which later blossomed in the United States, said Fred Minnick, who has written books on bourbon and judges world whiskey competitions.

"The distillers were starting to wake up — there was an interest in the whiskey, because the culture itself was beginning to change," Minnick said. "We were going from a steak-and-potatoes nation to foie gras and wagyu."

Minnick lovingly describes what it's like to sip a great bourbon, which obtains sweetness by absorbing natural wood sugars from charred oak barrels.

"It begins at the front of your tongue, walks itself back, will drip a little bit down your jawline, a little bit like butter, very velvety," Minnick said. "Caramel is one of the quintessential notes, followed by a little touch of vanilla."

Some of the world's top beverage companies that own major brands include Kirin (which owns Four Roses), Beam Suntory (Maker's Mark, Jim Beam, Knob Creek, Basil Hayden), Diageo (Bulleit, I.W. Harper), Sazerac (Buffalo Trace, Van Winkle, Blanton's) and Campari Group (Wild Turkey).

They boosted bourbon production with multimillion-dollar expansions and renovations, but there's still not enough of the best stuff to go around.

In Oregon, that scarcity led to the headline-grabbing scandal that drew attention to the state's system for distributing rare spirits.

Six Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission officials, including Executive Director Steve Marks, acknowledged they had Pappy or another hard-to-get bourbon, Elmer T. Lee Single Barrel, routed to liquor stores for their own purchase. All six denied they resold the bourbons.

The internal investigation determined they had violated an Oregon statute prohibiting public officials from using confidential information for personal gain. Gov. Tina Kotek sought Marks' resignation in February, and he quit. The other five are on paid temporary leave. An investigation by the state Department of Justice's Criminal Division continues.

In his responses to the commission investigator, Marks denied that he had violated Oregon ethics laws and state policy. However, he acknowledged that he had received preferential treatment "to some extent" in obtaining the whiskey as a commission employee.

Old Rip Van Winkle Distillery's suggested retail price of Pappy 23-year-old is \$299.99. Because of its extreme scarcity, it can go for a lot more on the resale market.

In December, a single bottle of Pappy 23-year-old sold at Sotheby's for a record \$52,500. Two other bottles auctioned for \$47,500 apiece. All three were originally released in 2008.

Despite Pappy 23-year-old's red-hot popularity, Minnick is not a big fan.

"Right or wrong, the Pappy Van Winkle 23-year-old is absolutely the most sought-after modern whiskey, year in, year out," Minnick said. "I personally think that the 23-year is hit-and-miss. It's typically over-oaked for me."

Timme sets record, Gonzaga routs Saint Mary's for WCC title

By MARK ANDERSON AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Gonzaga's players heard the criticisms this wasn't the same Bulldogs team that has been among the nation's elite in recent years, and they even struggled themselves to live up to the program's enormous expectations.

"There were numerous days where I was not fun to be around," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said.

The Bulldogs kept working at it, and on Tuesday night, No. 9 Gonzaga sent a message to the rest of the country with a dominant-from-the-start 77-51 victory over No. 16 Saint Mary's in the championship game of the West Coast Conference Tournament.

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The Zags (28-5) continued their domination of the WCC with their fourth consecutive tournament championship and 10th in 11 years, with Saint Mary's in 2019 being the only exception. Gonzaga has won 21 tournament titles overall.

Drew Timme scored 18 points and became Gonzaga's all-time leading scorer, earning tournament Most Outstanding Player.

"I took for granted winning," Timme said. "I won so much in my career, it's a shock not to win. I think early in the year, it just kind of made me appreciate what it takes to win night in and night out. I think sometimes we kind of assume we were just going to win because we're Gonzaga.

"Sometimes it's hard not to fall into mindset we just need to get to March. It was grind this season. I think that grind has made us as a group appreciate each and every night winning and what it takes to win and be a good team."

Saint Mary's (26-7) was seeded first in the tournament after the teams split the regular-season series, and Timme said it was strange wearing a blue jersey rather than the customary white one. The Gaels were the last team to beat Gonzaga, which takes a nine-game winning streak into the NCAA Tournament that includes beating Saint Mary's to end the regular season.

Both teams will find out their seedings and destinations Sunday.

Gonzaga made 58% of its shots, while holding Saint Mary's to 33% shooting. The Bulldogs led by as many as 37 points and never trailed.

Timme was efficient in making 8 of 10 shots to lead four Bulldogs into double figures. Malachi Smith scored 14 points, Nolan Hickman 12 points and Julian Strawther 10. Anton Watson had 10 rebounds.

Timme's short jumper with 10:18 left put him in first place alone as the leading scorer in Saint Mary's history. He entered just five points short of breaking the mark, and his 18 points for the game gave him 2,210 for his career. Frank Burgess held the previous record of 2,196 from 1958-61.

Logan Johnson led the Gaels with 20 points, and Alex Ducas scored 10.

Gonzaga took control early, using a nine-point run to go up 14-4 and maintained a double-digit lead most of the way from there. The Zags at one point in the first half made 10 of 12 field goals, and by halftime, they had taken full command with a 37-19 lead.

"I told our guys we played 32 games and played pretty well in 32 of them," Saint Mary's coach Randy Bennett said. "This one, we're off. You can credit them. They played well. We didn't show up."

BIG PICTURE

Gonzaga: Now is when the real pressure is on Gonzaga, which had made numerous deep runs in the NCAA Tournament, but is still searching for that elusive national championship. Until that happens, critics will say the WCC school is not on the same level as those from the power conference. It's up to the Zags to prove them wrong.

Saint Mary's: Saint Mary's nearly gave away all of a 26-point lead in Monday's semifinals because the Gaels had trouble with BYU's press. Gonzaga threw the press at Saint Mary's, and while it didn't result in transition baskets for the Bulldogs, it slowed the Gaels' offense. Saint Mary's will need to figure out how to better execute against the press, or it will be a problem in the NCAA Tournament.

UP NEXT

Gonzaga has a legitimate shot at a No. 2 seed, and it entered the game ninth in the NET rankings, a metric the NCAA committee uses in selecting the field. Even though Saint Mary's was ranked just one spot ahead of the Bulldogs, the Gaels likely are looking at more of a five or six seed.

FBI tested by attacks, politically explosive investigations

By ERIC TUCKER and DEL QUENTIN WILBER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Three days after federal agents searched former President Donald Trump's Florida home for classified documents, FBI Director Christopher Wray emailed his workforce urging them to tune out criticism from those who "don't know what we know and don't see what we see."

The work was done by the book, the director wrote in his Aug. 11 email. "We don't cut corners. We

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don't play favorites."

The internal message was an acknowledgment of the unprecedented nature of the search and the subsequent pummeling the bureau had been receiving from Trump and his supporters. It also was a recognition that the FBI had been navigating a moment so fraught that the normally taciturn Wray felt compelled to address employees about the ramifications of the investigation.

The pressures on Wray and the FBI have grown since then and are only likely to intensify. In its long history, the FBI has rarely been at the center of so many politically sensitive investigations. Agents are simultaneously examining the retention of classified documents by Trump and President Joe Biden. And they're scrutinizing efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn the 2020 election ahead of the Jan. 6, 2021, storming of the U.S. Capitol.

The probes, overseen by Justice Department special counsels, are unfolding in a hyper-partisan environment as the 2024 presidential election nears and as Congress launches its own investigations of the FBI. All the while, the bureau has been subjected to regular attacks from Trump, his supporters and influential right-wing pundits, with the former president saying FBI "misfits" are less credible than Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In an interview with The Associated Press this week, Wray acknowledged the FBI was enduring tough times. But he downplayed the impact the "noise" had on day-to-day work, insisting the opinions he most valued were those of "the people we do the work for and those we do the work with."

"I look not just at the one or two investigations being discussed breathlessly on social media or cable news but at the impact we're having across the country to protect the American people," he said.

Adding to the tension: Republicans are using their newly minted House majority to investigate the investigators, accusing the FBI of abuses ranging from unfairly targeting Trump to suppressing free speech. They've highlighted disputed, uncorroborated whistleblower complaints against supervisors that the FBI for privacy reasons says it's constrained from fully responding to.

Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, a Wray critic and chair of the House Judiciary Committee, told the AP last week he supported rank-and-file agents but was concerned about the leadership.

For Wray, the turbulence is more a continuation of a recent trend than something new.

He was appointed by Trump in 2017 after the chaotic firing of his predecessor, James Comey, and as the FBI investigated ties between Russia and Trump's 2016 campaign. Furious over that probe, Trump lashed out at Wray for the remainder of his term and openly flirted with firing him.

The director fastidiously ignored the verbal assaults, adhering to a "keep calm and tackle hard" mantra that he has repeatedly conveyed to agents but that can seem incongruous with a climate that is decidedly not calm. His approach did not change as the bureau initiated investigations involving the current and former presidents.

"We're not well-served by wading into the fray, taking the bait and responding to every breathless allegation," Wray told the AP. "So we will continue to push back and correct the record when we appropriately can. But as long as I'm director we're going to follow the FBI's long history and tradition of letting our work do the talking."

The AP spoke to about two dozen current and former FBI officials for this story. Most spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss FBI matters publicly. Many of those interviewed said they were distressed to see the FBI entangled in politics, lamenting not only the barrage of attacks the bureau faces but also Justice Department policies and actions, like a memo directing the FBI to address threatening rhetoric at school board meetings, that they believe have injected the bureau into the partisan fray and invited criticism.

Some who are personally supportive of Wray and respect his approach to the job contend he and the FBI could more forcefully punch back against false narratives and do better in explaining its work to the public. That's admittedly a complicated calculus for the FBI given that Comey was widely criticized for public statements about the Hillary Clinton email probe, an experience that exists as a cautionary tale for the more circumspect Wray.

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Greg Brower, who worked with Comey and Wray when he was the FBI's top liaison to Congress, said he believes Wray strives to do what's right without regard to pressure and was unlikely to adapt his style to satisfy critics. Though not inclined to second-guess Wray, he said it could be argued that Wray's "conventional" style should be modified for unconventional times and that aggressive pushback was needed to prevent false narratives from taking hold.

"It does appear sometimes that the narrative that the bureau's opponents are creating, the very often false narrative, it takes on a life of its own and becomes reality for all intents and purposes. It causes the bureau to be completely mischaracterized in a way that's hard to undo," Brower said.

Joshua Skule, a former top agent, echoed that assessment, saying "truth is decaying in our society. To combat that, you have to overcommunicate, in the field office and from headquarters."

Though the attacks aren't always rooted in facts, the perception matters because regardless of how the Trump and Biden investigations are resolved, the FBI and Justice Department will have to persuade the public that the probes were done thoroughly and professionally.

The partisan environment magnifies self-inflicted wounds that have damaged the FBI's credibility, making it more difficult to counter conspiracy theories and questionable narratives.

The recent indictment of an ex-FBI counterintelligence official gave FBI critics fodder. The FBI came under pressure at a congressional hearing last week over a leaked field office memo that warned of potential Catholic extremists, a document Attorney General Merrick Garland called "appalling" and said had been withdrawn. Older errors during the Trump-Russia investigation, including bungled wiretap applications targeting a Trump aide, continue to shadow the bureau years later.

"We take those to heart each and every day," FBI Deputy Director Paul Abbate said about the Trump-Russia mistakes in a separate interview.

The inherent tripwires of politically explosive investigations were manifest last summer, when some in the FBI resisted the idea of serving a search warrant at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate, believing a more cautious approach was better and that the Trump team was entitled to more time to cooperate, according to a person with knowledge of the talks. The Washington Post earlier reported the disagreements.

In the days after the search, as U.S. officials warned of an alarming spike in threats against the FBI, a 42-year-old Trump supporter attacked the FBI's Cincinnati field office. No FBI employees were harmed, but police killed the gunman.

For his part, Wray said he tries to communicate as much as he can about the FBI's work, including about the Chinese espionage threat or other priorities, but no matter how much he does so, "the focus is on the manufactured controversies of the day or the one or two cases that get all the attention."

He believes a key part of his job is to step up outreach to his 38,000-member workforce. Besides the message after the Mar-a-Largo search, he held an employee town hall in December, taking questions about public perception of the FBI, agent safety and allegations of politicization.

He also frequently visits the bureau's 56 field offices to speak to agents and local law enforcement. Last month, he journeyed to Norfolk, Virginia, where he discussed violent crime prevention and national security issues. But national politics intruded even there.

During a news conference with local journalists, Wray was asked whether the recent and intense public scrutiny of the bureau was impeding investigations. He offered a rosy take, saying that though he understood the concern, the FBI was "humming along and growing like gangbusters."

"At the end of the day," he said of the workforce, "they're not doing it to attract popularity contests on social media or to win the adoration of pundits."

Governments criticized for keeping women from peace talks

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — On the eve of International Women's Day, leading women's rights campaigners at the United Nations and the African Union and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate criticized male-dominated governments Tuesday for excluding women from peace negotiations.

They complained that governments are ignoring a U.N. resolution adopted in 2000 demanding equal

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participation for women in talks to end conflicts.

Sima Bahous, head of the U.N. agency promoting gender equality, lamented "the regression in women's rights." She told the Security Council that "we have neither significantly changed the composition of peace tables, nor the impunity enjoyed by those who commit atrocities against women and girls."

Bahous, executive director of UN Women, called for "a radical change of direction."

She said action should be taken to mandate the inclusion of women at every meeting and in every decision-making process, with consequences for non-compliance. And funds should be channeled to women's groups in conflict-affected countries where the money is most needed, she said.

The Security Council was assessing the state of the resolution it adopted on Oct. 31, 2000, that stresses the important role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts and demands their equal participation in all efforts to promote peace and security. It also calls on all parties to conflicts to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, especially rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

Since the 20th anniversary of the resolution in 2020, Bahous said, Afghanistan's Taliban rulers have imposed "gender apartheid" and war in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region reportedly led to sexual violence "at a staggering scale." Coups in conflict-affected countries in Africa's Sahel and Sudan to Myanmar have dramatically shrunk the civic space for women's organizations and activists, she added.

The U.N. Commission on the Status of Women began its annual two-week session Monday focusing on closing gender gaps in technology and innovation. It is also examining digital harassment and disinformation aimed at women that fosters violent misogyny.

Bahous cited a recent study that says politically motivated online abuse of women within Myanmar and from the country increased at least fivefold after that country's February 2021 coup.

"This mainly takes the form of sexualized threats and the release of home addresses, contact details, and personal photos or videos of women who had commented positively on groups opposing military rule in Myanmar," she said.

Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, addressed the gender-based violence aspect of the U.N. resolution, saying that "more than 100 armed conflicts are raging around the world" and hard-won gains toward gender equality are being reversed.

"This is no coincidence," she said. "As respect for gender equality declines, violence rises."

Egger said the Red Cross sees "the brutal impact" every day of "sexual violence at the hands of arms bearers at shocking levels."

Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowee, who mobilized street protests against the brutality of the country's long civil war and shared the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, told the council that "it has been proven time and again that men do make war but are unable to make peace themselves."

"Sadly, the conversation is the same in 2023," she said. "How do we discuss the issue of peace and security and leave out fifty percent of the population?"

Gbowee said that as the U.N. resolution on women, peace and security approaches its 23rd anniversary "investment in its implementation is either stalled or slow."

Action plans submitted by governments are "a tool for politicians and political actors to window-dress women peace and security issues as they cover up for their failure" to advance women's rights, she said.

Gbowee called for women peace activists to be part of all peace missions, calling them "custodians of their communities."

"We will continue to search for peace in vain in our world unless we bring women to the table," she warned.

Bineta Diop, the African Union Commission chair's special envoy on women, peace and security, said in a virtual briefing to the council that the current impact of armed conflict on women and girls "is precarious."

Diop cited kidnappings in the Sahel, rape, killing and maiming of young girls and boys in Congo, and atrocities in the Lake Chad Basin and in East Africa, including "an unprecedented rate of sexual violence."

"Unfortunately, while many women are engaged in the community and peacebuilding initiatives, their voice is yet to be heard in peace negotiations and mediation where roadmaps to return to peace are drawn," she said.

Diop said the African Union is helping to promote African women leaders who can sit at peace tables and to bring women from rival regions together, as just happened at a retreat in Pretoria, South Africa, for Ethiopian women.

How passengers teamed up to restrain man on chaotic flight

By MARK PRATT Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A passenger who helped restrain a threatening man on a weekend flight from Los Angeles to Boston said Tuesday that the entire chaotic episode was over within seconds thanks to teamwork.

Simik Ghookasian said in a telephone interview that he was seated several rows behind the man, who had quietly tried to open an airliner's emergency door before trying to stab a flight attendant with a broken metal spoon, according to prosecutors.

"I heard the guy getting louder and louder and I thought it was just an argument, but he started yelling and screaming and threatening people, threatening to kill them," said Ghookasian, a Los Angeles government contractor flying to Boston on United Flight 2609 on Sunday for work.

Until the yelling, he hadn't noticed anything unusual about the man, who federal authorities have identified as Francisco Severo Torres.

Ghookasian said he saw the spoon and he was among five or six passengers who piled onto Torres and removed it from his grasp. It turned out to be the handle of a metal spoon, from which the bowl portion had been broken off, authorities said.

"That guy was really strong and was really resisting," Ghookasian said. "We had a hard time holding him down. It was total teamwork."

Ghookasian asked a flight attendant for some zip ties or duct tape, and the flight attendant produced some zip ties.

Ghookasian, who said he has first aid and counter-terrorism training, said he didn't have time to be scared, he just reacted and used his instincts.

"Everything just exploded in a few seconds," he said.

Torres, 33, of Leominster, Massachusetts, was arrested when the plane arrived in Boston and charged with interference and attempted interference with flight crew members and attendants using a dangerous weapon, federal prosecutors said. He was detained pending a hearing scheduled for Thursday.

The plane was about 45 minutes from Boston when the crew received an alarm that a side door on the aircraft was disarmed, according to court documents. One flight attendant noticed the door's locking handle had been moved. Another flight attendant had noticed that Torres was seen near the door and believed he had moved the handle.

Airplane doors cannot be opened once in flight due to cabin pressure.

The crew told the captain that he was a threat and the plane should be landed as soon as possible, authorities said.

Then Torres approached two flight attendants, according to the court documents. One of the flight attendants felt the metal object in Torres' hand hit him on his shirt collar and tie three times.

Torres told investigators that he went into the airplane's bathroom and broke a spoon in half to make a weapon, prosecutors said in the documents. They say he told authorities he wanted to open the door so that he could jump out of the plane.

Investigators said Torres admitted knowing that if he opened the door many people would die.

Torres said the flight attendants confronted him and he stabbed one of them in an attempt to defend himself, according to investigators. They said he believed the flight attendant was trying to kill him.

Authorities did not say where Torres got the spoon, but TSA rules allow airline passengers to bring metal utensils except knives onto planes.

United Airlines said no one was injured.

"Thanks to the quick action of our crew and customers, one customer was restrained after becoming a security concern on United flight 2609 from Los Angeles to Boston," the company statement said. "The

flight landed safely and was met by law enforcement.”

If convicted of the charges against him, Torres could face life in prison.

An email seeking comment from him was sent to his federal public defender, and a voicemail was left.

Torres has previously sued two mental health facilities where he was patient, according to federal court records. He sued the state-run Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital in March 2021, alleging medical malpractice for misdiagnosis. That suit was dismissed several months later.

He also sued Fuller Hospital in Attleboro, Massachusetts last May, alleging his constitutional rights were violated because he was a vegan and was denied almond milk. The suit was dismissed in June.

In both cases he acted as his own attorney.

Oklahoma voters reject legalizing recreational marijuana

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma voters on Tuesday rejected the legalization of recreational marijuana, following a late blitz of opposition from faith leaders, law enforcement and prosecutors.

Oklahoma would have become the 22nd state to legalize adult use of cannabis and join conservative states like Montana and Missouri that have approved similar proposals in recent years. Many conservative states have also rejected the idea, including Arkansas, North Dakota and South Dakota last year.

Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt and many of the state’s GOP legislators, including nearly every Republican senator, opposed the idea. Former Republican Gov. Frank Keating, an ex-FBI agent, and Terri White, the former head of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, led the “no” campaign.

“We’re pleased the voters have spoken,” said Pat McFerron, a Republican political strategist who ran the opposition campaign. “We think this sends a clear signal that voters are not happy with the recreational nature of our medicinal system. We also think it shows voters recognize the criminal aspects, as well as the need for addressing mental health needs of the state.”

Oklahoma voters already approved medical marijuana in 2018 by 14 percentage points and the state has one of the most liberal programs in the country, with more than 2,800 licensed dispensaries and roughly 10% of the state’s adult population having a medical license to buy and consume cannabis.

On Tuesday’s legalization question, the “no” side was outspent more than 20-to-1, with supporters of the initiative spending more than \$4.9 million, compared to about \$219,000 against, last-minute campaign finance reports show.

State Question 820, the result of a signature gathering drive last year, was the only item on the statewide ballot, and early results showed heavy opposition in rural areas.

“Oklahoma is a law and order state,” Stitt said in a statement after Tuesday’s vote. “I remain committed to protecting Oklahomans and my administration will continue to hold bad actors accountable and crack down on illegal marijuana operations in our state.”

The proposal, if passed, would have allowed anyone over the age of 21 to purchase and possess up to 1 ounce of marijuana, plus concentrates and marijuana-infused products. Recreational sales would have been subjected to a 15% excise tax on top of the standard sales tax. The excise tax would be used to help fund local municipalities, the court system, public schools, substance abuse treatment and the state’s general revenue fund.

The prospect of having more Oklahomans smoking anything, including marijuana, didn’t sit well with Mark Grossman, an attorney who voted against the proposal Tuesday at the Crown Heights Christian Church in Oklahoma City.

“I was a no vote because I’m against smoking,” Grossman said. “Tobacco smoking was a huge problem for my family.”

The low barriers for entry into Oklahoma’s medical marijuana industry has led to a flood of growers, processors and dispensary operators competing for a limited number of customers. Supporters had hoped the state’s marijuana industry would be buoyed by a rush of out-of-state customers, particularly from

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Texas, which has close to 8 million people in the Dallas-Fort Worth area just a little more than an hour drive from the Oklahoma border.

Michelle Tilley, campaign director for Yes on 820, said despite Tuesday's result, full marijuana legalization was inevitable. She noted that almost 400,000 Oklahomans already use marijuana legally and "many thousands more" use it illegally.

"A two-tiered system, where one group of Oklahomans is free to use this product and the other is treated like criminals does not make logical sense," she said in a statement.

Author Ian Falconer of 'Olivia' books for children dies

NORWALK, Conn. (AP) — Author and illustrator Ian Woodward Falconer, known for his "Olivia" book series for children, has died.

Falconer's lawyer and agent Conrad M. Rippey said Falconer died Tuesday of natural causes while with family in Norwalk, Connecticut. He was 63.

Falconer's "Olivia" books featured a clever piglet with a great imagination named Olivia, a character he developed for his young niece in 1996. Family members and friends encouraged him to keep working on the character.

He turned down publishers who wanted the text be written by an outside author. "I am afraid my vanity wouldn't allow me to relegate myself to 'illustrated by,'" he said. "I also thought my instincts about the story were, if unpolished, right, and had happened organically with the pictures."

The first book in the series, called "Olivia," was published in 2000. It stayed on the New York Times bestseller list for over a year, was awarded the Caldecott Honor and has sold over 10 million copies.

He wrote and illustrated seven sequels, the last of which was "Olivia the Spy" in 2017.

In 2022, he published a new book for children called "Two Dogs." He told National Public Radio last year the characters, a pair of dachshunds named Perry and Augie, were inspired by his nephews.

Falconer was also a designer of sets and costumes for ballet and opera companies around the world including numerous productions by the New York City Ballet. He also created 30 magazine covers for The New Yorker.

Falconer was born Aug. 25, 1969, in Ridgefield, Connecticut, studied art history at New York University for two years and then enrolled as a painter at the Parsons School of Design. He transferred to the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles and began working with artist David Hockney, helping him in his stage opera designs.

Falconer is survived by his mother Sandy and sisters Tonia and Tory, as well as nieces and nephews Olivia, Ian, August, Perry and Will.

Safety agency opens probe of Norfolk Southern rail accidents

By JOSH FUNK and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Federal investigators are opening a wide-ranging investigation into one of the nation's biggest railroads following a fiery derailment on the Ohio-Pennsylvania border last month and several other accidents involving Norfolk Southern, including the death of a train conductor Tuesday.

The National Transportation Safety Board said on Tuesday it will begin a broad look at the company's safety culture — the first such investigation within the rail industry since 2014. The board said it has sent investigation teams to look into five significant accidents involving Norfolk Southern since December 2021.

The agency also urged the company to take immediate action to review and assess its safety practices.

The Federal Railroad Administration also announced its own investigation of Norfolk Southern on Tuesday. The administration will issue a public report after conducting a 60-day safety assessment, according to a release from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

In the release, the railroad administration said Norfolk Southern must go beyond the steps it announced Monday and take actions "that match the severity of recent incidents."

Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw pledged to hold a series of companywide safety meetings Wednesday.

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day — one day ahead of when he is scheduled to testify in Congress at a hearing on the East Palestine, Ohio, derailment.

“Moving forward, we are going to rebuild our safety culture from the ground up,” he said in a statement. “We are going to invest more in safety. This is not who we are, it is not acceptable, and it will not continue.”

In response to the Ohio derailment, the railroad on Monday announced plans to improve the use of detectors placed along railroad tracks to spot overheating bearings and other problems.

Investigators with the National Transportation Safety Board said the crew operating the train that derailed Feb. 3 outside East Palestine, Ohio, got a warning from such a detector but couldn't stop the train before more than three dozen cars came off the tracks and caught fire.

Half of the town of about 5,000 people had to evacuate for days when responders intentionally burned toxic chemicals in some of the derailed cars to prevent an uncontrolled explosion, leaving residents with lingering health concerns. Government officials say tests haven't found dangerous levels of chemicals in the air or water in the area.

Within the industry, Norfolk Southern has had a strong reputation for being a safe railroad over the years, said Christopher Barkan, director of the Rail Transportation and Engineering Center at the University of Illinois.

Federal Railroad Administration statistics show accidents involving Norfolk Southern is down since 2019, but the rate of accidents is up over the past decade. The 119 derailments involving Norfolk Southern last year was the lowest number in the last decade. Industrywide, there were more than 1,000 derailments last year.

But pressure has been mounting on the railroad in the aftermath of the East Palestine disaster.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg told the nation's freight railroads in February to immediately act to improve safety while regulators were focusing on strengthening safety rules. Buttigieg said the department will hold the railroad accountable for any safety violations that contributed to the Feb. 3 crash.

President Joe Biden said on Twitter after the derailment that the past pattern of railroads resisting safety regulations must change and that Congress should support the effort to improve safety.

Even though government data shows that derailments have declined in recent years, there were still 1,049 of them last year.

While most don't cause any major problems, of the five accidents the National Transportation Safety Board pointed to involving Norfolk Southern since the end of 2021, three resulted in the deaths of three workers.

On Saturday, no one was hurt when a Norfolk Southern freight train derailed near Springfield, Ohio.

In the latest incident Tuesday, a train and a dump truck collided at a steel plant in Cleveland, killing the train conductor who was standing on the outside of a car, authorities said. The company said the cause of that accident was not yet known.

Eddie Hall, president of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen union that represents the worker who was killed, said the death is a reminder of the need for safety improvements.

“All railroad accidents are avoidable,” Hall said. “This collision underscores the need for significant improvements in rail safety for both workers and the public.”

US to relax COVID testing rules for travelers from China

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is preparing to relax COVID-19 testing restrictions for travelers from China as soon as Friday, according to two people familiar with the decision.

The people, who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the administration has decided to roll back the testing requirements as cases, hospitalizations and deaths are declining in China and the U.S. has gathered better information about the surge.

The restrictions were put in place on Dec. 28 and took effect on Jan. 5 amid a surge in infections in China after the nation sharply eased pandemic restrictions and as U.S. health officials expressed concerns

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that their Chinese counterparts were not being truthful to the world about the true number of infections and deaths. The Washington Post was first to report on Tuesday about the expected administration move.

At the time, U.S. officials also said the restriction was necessary to protect U.S. citizens and communities because there was a lack of transparency from the Chinese government about the size of the surge or the variants that were circulating within China.

As part of its response, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention earlier this year expanded genomic surveillance at several U.S. airports, collecting voluntary samples from passengers aboard hundreds of weekly flights from China, and the testing of wastewater aboard airplanes. The Traveler-based Genomic Surveillance Program will continue to monitor travelers from China and more than 30 other countries.

The rules imposed in January require travelers to the U.S. from China, Hong Kong and Macau to take a COVID-19 test no more than two days before travel and provide a negative test before boarding their flight. The testing applies to anyone 2 years and older, including U.S. citizens.

It also applied to people traveling from China via a third country and to people connecting through the U.S. as they go on to other destinations. Anyone testing positive more than 10 days before the flight can provide documentation showing they've recovered from COVID-19 instead of a negative test result.

It has been left to the airlines to confirm negative tests and documentation of recovery before passengers board.

China saw infections and deaths surge after it eased back from its "zero COVID" strategy in early December after rare public protests against a policy that confined millions of people to their homes and sparked protests and demands for President Xi Jinping to resign.

But as China eased its strict rules, infections and deaths surged, and parts of the country for weeks saw their hospitals overwhelmed by infected patients looking for help. Still, the Chinese government has been slow to release data on the number of deaths and infections.

The U.S. decision to lift restrictions comes at a moment when U.S.-China relations are strained. Biden ordered a Chinese spy balloon shot down last month after it traversed the continental United States. The Biden administration has also publicized U.S. intelligence findings that raise concern Beijing is weighing providing Russia weaponry for its ongoing war on Ukraine.

Earlier Tuesday, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang warned that Beijing and Washington were headed for "conflict and confrontation" if the U.S. doesn't change course.

Qin's comments came a day after Xi in an unusually pointed speech said that "Western countries led by the United States have implemented all-round containment, encirclement and suppression of China."

White House officials sought to downplay the hot rhetoric from Beijing.

"There is no change to the United States' posture when it comes to this bilateral relationship," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said. "The president believes those tensions obviously have to be recognized, but can be worked through."

Tucker Carlson amplifies Jan. 6 lies with GOP-provided video

By LISA MASCARO, MARY CLARE JALONICK and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Handed some 41,000 hours of Jan. 6 security footage, Fox News' Tucker Carlson has launched an impassioned new effort to explain away the deadly Capitol attack, linking the Republican Party ever more closely to pro-Trump conspiracy theories about the 2021 riot.

The conservative commentator aired a first installment to millions of viewers on his prime-time show Monday, working to bend perceptions of the violent, grueling siege that played out for the world to see into a narrative favorable to Donald Trump. A small additional bit was shown Tuesday amid calls from critics to stop.

The undertaking by Fox News comes as Trump is again running for president, and executives at the highest levels of the cable news giant have admitted in unrelated court proceedings that it spread the former president's false claims about the 2020 election despite dismissing Trump's assertions privately.

The effort dovetails with the work of Republicans on Capitol Hill, led by House Speaker Kevin McCarthy,

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who turned over the security footage to Fox. The Republicans are trying to claw back the findings of the House Jan. 6 investigation, which painstakingly documented, with testimony and video evidence, how Trump rallied his supporters to head to the Capitol and "fight like hell" as Congress was certifying his loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

Trump on Tuesday contended that Carlson's presentation was "irrefutable" evidence that rioters have been wrongly accused of crimes and he thanked the host and the speaker for their work. Carlson praised McCarthy as having "rectified" the official record.

Trump called anew for the release from custody of people who have been convicted or have pleaded guilty to charges from the attack.

At the same time, criticism poured in from Democrats — and some top Republicans, too — over the GOP's attempt to amplify falsehoods about the attack that was seen around the world as Trump supporters laid siege to the seat of U.S. democracy.

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, the Democrat who chaired the House Jan. 6 Committee investigating the riot, called McCarthy's decision to selectively release the security footage "a dereliction of duty."

"The speaker decided it was more important to give in to a Fox host who spews lies and propaganda than to protect the Capitol," Thompson said in a statement. He called Jan. 6 "one of the darkest days in the history of our democracy."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called the Monday night Fox News episode from Carlson "one of the most shameful hours we have ever seen on television."

The show's portrayal was "an insult to every single police officer," Schumer said, especially the family of Brian Sicknick, who died later after fighting the mob. "Nonviolent? Ask his family."

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said it was a mistake for Fox News to depict the footage as it did — at odds with the Capitol Police assessment and what he and others witnessed firsthand at the Capitol on Jan. 6.

But McCarthy, who has shifted from blaming Trump for the riot to softening his criticism of the former president, stood by his decision, saying people can watch and "come up with their own conclusion."

In the roughly 30-minute segment, Fox distilled the thousands of hours of footage of the gruesome scenes at the Capitol that day and did show some of the hand-to-hand combat as rioters laid siege to the building, broke windows and kicked down doors to gain entry.

But Carlson also emphasized imagery of the invaders, some in combat gear and wielding flagpoles, merely milling about the gilded halls, taking pictures of the surroundings during pauses in the hours-long attack.

"These were not insurrectionists. They were sightseers," Carlson said.

The footage he aired focused on one of the highest-profile rioters, Jacob Chansley, the "QAnon Shaman," garbed in his horned hat and bare chested, as he poked around the building, officers standing by or opening doors. Chansley pleaded guilty to a felony charge of obstructing an official proceeding and was sentenced to 41 months in prison.

Carlson denounced the Jan. 6 committee led by Democrats in the past Congress, and called out Trump's chief Republican critics Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger as liars on the panel.

Carlson is reviving the falsehoods launched by Trump and his allies, including Republicans in Congress, that the attackers were peaceful protesters and acted like tourists, despite the well-documented carnage of the day and the deaths of five people in the riot and its aftermath. It's part of an effort to reverse criminal charges for those being prosecuted in the attack, many of whom have pleaded guilty and said they regretted their actions on Jan. 6.

Capitol Police officers who were defending against the mob have testified to their harrowing experiences — one said she was slipping in other people's blood, while another told of being crushed in the mob — as they worked and ultimately failed to block the rioters from storming the Capitol.

The criminal cases stemming from the riot have laid bare the violence. Officers have testified in court about being chased, hit, dragged and scared for their lives as they tried to defend the Capitol. One tweeted images late Monday of his cuts, stitches and swollen bruises from that day.

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Among those who died in the riot and its aftermath were Trump supporter Ashli Babbitt who was shot by police and Capitol Police officer Sicknick who died after fighting the mob.

Carlson aired footage of Sicknick inside the Capitol picking up posters and politely ushering protesters out the door, portraying that as evidence the officer was not killed in the crush.

That last was denounced by Capitol Police Chief Tom Manger as "the most disturbing accusation from last night."

"The Department maintains, as anyone with common sense would, that had Officer Sicknick not fought valiantly for hours on the day he was violently assaulted, Officer Sicknick would not have died the next day," Chief Manger said in a memo to his police force.

He said the program "cherry-picked" from calmer moments of the day, ignoring "the chaos and violence that happened before or during."

The Sicknick family said in a statement that the footage simply showed that Brian Sicknick bravely resumed his duties for a time after he had been attacked by a chemical agent.

Ken Sicknick, Brian Sicknick's brother, said in an interview that the family is "at a loss" about how to fight back against a network with millions of viewers and the speaker of the House who gave access to the footage.

Law enforcement failures on Jan. 6 have been investigated in Congress and acknowledged: Police failed to heed signs of a looming attack and were slow to provide an adequate response, including reinforcement from the National Guard.

More than half of the roughly 1,000 people charged with Capitol riot-related federal crimes have pleaded guilty, including more than 130 who pleaded guilty to felony crimes, according to an Associated Press tally.

Members of the extremist Proud Boys and Oath Keepers groups are facing rare charges of sedition for their roles at the front of the assault. Several members of the Oath Keepers have been found guilty of sedition. Hundreds of other rioters were charged only with misdemeanor offenses and many have served no prison time.

Republicans on Capitol Hill are mounting an effort to retell the history of Jan. 6 through the House Administration Committee, which has opened an online portal for submissions from the public.

Some GOP leaders, however, appeared uncomfortable with McCarthy's move and the way the footage was being used.

Senate Republican leader McConnell quickly distanced himself from the endeavor, saying he wanted to "associate myself entirely" with the police chief's views.

McConnell said, "Clearly the chief of the Capitol Police correctly describes what most of us witnessed firsthand on Jan. 6."

When Hollywood needs a movie villain, the tech bro answers

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — "A toast to the disruptors," Edward Norton's tech billionaire says in Rian Johnson's Oscar-nominated "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery."

And why not a toast? Sunday's Academy Awards won't give a prize for best villain, but if they did, Miles Bron would win it in a walk. (With apologies to the cloud of "Nope.") He is an immediately recognizable type we've grown well acquainted with: a visionary (or so everyone says), a social media narcissist, a self-styled disrupter who talks a lot about "breaking stuff."

Miles Bron is just the latest in a long line of Hollywood's favorite villain: the tech bro. Looking north to Silicon Valley, the movie industry has found perhaps its richest resource of big-screen antagonists since Soviet-era Russia.

Great movie villains don't come along often. The best-picture nominated "Top Gun: Maverick," like its predecessor, was content to battle with a faceless enemy of unspecified nationality. Why antagonize international ticket buyers when Tom Cruise vs. Whomever works just fine?

But in recent years, the tech bro has proliferated on movie screens as Hollywood's go-to bad guy. It's

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a rise that has mirrored mounting fears over technology's expanding reach into our lives and increasing skepticism for the not always altruistic motives of the men – and it is mostly men – who control today's digital empires.

We've had the devious Biosyn Genetics CEO (Campbell Scott) in "Jurassic World: Dominion, a franchise dedicated to the peril of tech overreach; Chris Hemsworth's biotech overlord in "Spiderhead"; and Mark Rylance's maybe-Earth-destroying tech guru in 2021's "Don't Look Up." We've had Eisenberg, again, as a tech bro-styled Lex Luthor in 2016's "Batman v. Superman"; Harry Melling's pharmaceutical entrepreneur in 2020's "The Old Guard"; Taika Waititi's rule-breaking videogame mogul in 2021's "Free Guy"; Oscar Isaac's search engine CEO in 2014's "Ex Machina"; and the critical portrait of the Apple co-founder in 2015's "Steve Jobs."

Kids movies, too, regularly channel parental anxieties about technology's impact on children. In 2021's "The Mitchells vs. the Machines," a newly launched AI brings about a robot apocalypse. "Ron's Gone Wrong" (2021) also used a robot metaphor for smartphone addiction. And TV series have just as aggressively rushed to dramatize Big Tech blunders. Recent entries include: Uber's Travis Kalanick in Showtime's "Super Pumped"; Theranos' Elizabeth Holmes in Hulu's "The Dropout"; and WeWork's Adam and Rebekah Neumann in Apple TV's "We Crashed."

Some of these portrayals you could chalk up to Hollywood jealousy over the emergence of another California epicenter of innovation. But those worlds merged long ago. Many of the companies that released these movies are disrupters, themselves — none more than Netflix, distributor of "Glass Onion." The streamer was cajoled into releasing Johnson's sequel more widely in theaters than any previous Netflix release. Estimates suggested the film collected some \$15 million over opening weekend, the old fashioned way, but Netflix executives have said they don't plan to make a habit of such theatrical rollouts.

And the distrust goes deeper than any Hollywood-Silicon Valley rivalry. A recent Quinnipiac poll found that 70% of Americans think social media companies do more harm than good. Tech leaders like Meta chief Mark Zuckerberg have at times been seen favorably by only 1 in 5 Americans.

As characters, tech bros — hoodie-wearing descendants of the mad scientist — have formed an archetype: Masters of the universe whose hubris leads to catastrophe, social media savants who can't manage their personal relationships. Whether their visions of the future pan out or not, we end up living in their world, either way. They're villains who see themselves as heroes.

"In my mind, he's really the most dangerous human being around," Rylance says of his Peter Isherwell. "He believes that we can dominate our way out of any problem that nature hands us. I think that's the same kind of thinking that's got us into the problem we're in now, trying to dominate each other and dominate all the life we're intimately connected to and dependent on."

"Glass Onion," nominated for best adapted screenplay, presents a new escalation in tech mogul mockery. Norton's eminently punchable CEO, with a name so nearly "Bro," is enormously rich, powerful and, considering that he's working on a volatile new energy source, dangerous. But Bron is also, as Daniel Craig's Benoit Blanc eventually deduces, an idiot. "A vainglorious buffoon," Blanc says.

In Johnson's film, the tech bro/emperor bro truly has no clothes. He's just skating by with lies, deceit and a bunch of not-real words like "predefinite" and "inbreathiate."

Even though Johnson wrote "Glass Onion" well before Elon Musk's shambolic Twitter takeover, the movie's release seemed almost preternaturally timed to coincide with it. The Tesla and SpaceX chief executive was only one of Johnson's real-world inspirations, some took Bron as a direct Musk parody. In a widely read Twitter thread, conservative commentator Ben Shapiro said Johnson was dramatizing Musk as "a bad and stupid man," which he called "an incredibly stupid theory, since Musk is one of the most successful entrepreneurs in human history." He added: "How many rockets has Johnson launched lately?"

Musk, himself, hasn't publicly commented on "Glass Onion," but he has previously had numerous gripes with Hollywood, including its depictions of guys like him. "Hollywood refuses to write even one story about an actual company startup where the CEO isn't a dweeb and/or evil," Musk tweeted last year.

Musk will soon enough get his own movie. The Oscar-winning documentarian Alex Gibney on Monday

announced his several months into work on "Musk," which producers promise will offer a "definitive and unvarnished examination" of the tech entrepreneur.

At the same time as the tech bro's supervillainy supremacy has emerged, some movies have sought not to lampoon Big Tech but to imbibe some of the digital world's infinite expanse. Phil Lord, who with Christopher Miller has produced "The Mitchells vs the Machines" and the multiverse-splitting "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse," says the internet has profoundly influenced their approach to film.

"We, legacy media, are responding in maybe subconscious ways to new media," says Lord. "We're all just trying to figure out how to live in the new world. It's changing people's behavior. It changes the way we find and experience love. It changes the way we live. Of course, the stories we tell and how we tell them are going to change as well and reflect that. 'Into the Spider-Verse' certainly reflects having a lot of content from every era in your brain all at the same time."

The best-picture favorite "Everything Everywhere All at Once," too, is reflective of our multi-screen, media-bombarded lives. Writer-directors Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, whose film is up for a leading 11 Oscars, say they wanted to channel the confusion and heartache of living in the everything-everywhere existence that tech moguls like Miles Bron helped create.

"The reason why we made the movie is because that's what modern life feels like," says Kwan.

So even though Miles Bron won't go home with an Academy Award on Sunday, he still wins, in a way. It's his world. We're all just living in it.

Survivors of deadly Mexico abduction returned to US

By ALFREDO PEÑA, FABIOLA SANCHEZ and TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

CIUDAD VICTORIA, Mexico (AP) — A road trip to Mexico for cosmetic surgery veered violently off course when four Americans were caught in a drug cartel shootout, leaving two dead and two held captive for days in a remote region of the Gulf coast before they were rescued from a wood shack, officials said Tuesday.

Their minivan crashed and was fired on shortly after they crossed into the border city of Matamoros on Friday as drug cartel factions tore through the streets, the region's governor said. A stray bullet also killed a Mexican woman about a block and a half away.

The four Americans were hauled off in a pickup truck, and Mexican authorities frantically searched as the cartel moved them around — even taking them to a medical clinic — "to create confusion and avoid efforts to rescue them," Tamaulipas Gov. Américo Villarreal said.

They were found Tuesday in a wooden shack, guarded by a man who was arrested, in a rural area east of Matamoros called Ejido Tecolote on the way to the Gulf called "Bagdad Beach," according to the state's chief prosecutor, Irving Barrios.

The surviving Americans were whisked back to U.S. soil on Tuesday in Brownsville, the southernmost tip of Texas and just across the border from Matamoros. The convoy of ambulances and SUVs was escorted by Mexican military Humvees and National Guard trucks with mounted machine guns.

A relative of one of the victims said Monday that the four had traveled together from the Carolinas so one of them could get a tummy tuck surgery from a doctor in Matamoros.

The governor said the wounded American, Eric Williams, had been shot in the left leg and the injury was not life threatening.

"It's quite a relief," said Robert Williams, 38-year-old Eric's brother, reached by phone Tuesday in North Carolina. "I look forward to seeing him again and actually being able to talk to him."

Robert Williams was not sure if the other survivor, Latavia Burgess, was the one seeking the surgery.

The survivors were taken to Valley Regional Medical Center with an FBI escort, the Brownsville Herald reported. A spokesperson for the hospital referred all inquiries to the FBI.

The two dead — Shaeed Woodard, age 33, and Zindell Brown, in his mid-20s — will be turned over to U.S. authorities following forensic work at the Matamoros morgue, the governor said.

Video and photographs taken during and immediately after Friday's abduction show the Americans' white minivan sitting beside another vehicle, with at least one bullet hole in the driver's side window. A witness

said the two vehicles had collided. Almost immediately, several men with tactical vests and assault rifles arrived in another vehicle to surround the scene.

The Mexican authorities' hypothesis is "that it was confusion, not a direct attack," the state prosecutor said.

The gunmen walked one of the Americans into the bed of a white pickup, then dragged and loaded up the three others. Terrified civilian motorists sat silently in their cars, hoping not to draw attention. Two of the victims appeared to be motionless.

The shootings illustrate the terror that has prevailed for years in Matamoros, a city dominated by factions of the powerful Gulf drug cartel who often fight among themselves. Amid the violence, thousands of Mexicans have disappeared in Tamaulipas state alone.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said the people responsible would be punished. He referenced arrests in the 2019 killings of nine U.S.-Mexican dual citizens in Sonora near the U.S. border.

López Obrador complained about the U.S. media's coverage of the missing Americans, accusing them of sensationalism. He said that when Mexicans are killed, the media "go quiet like mummies."

"We really regret that this happens in our country," he said, adding that the U.S. government has every right to be upset by the violence.

U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland put blame for the deaths squarely on the drug cartels

"The DEA and the FBI are doing everything possible to dismantle and disrupt and ultimately prosecute the leaders of the cartels and the entire networks that they depend on" Garland said.

The FBI had offered a \$50,000 reward for the victims' return and the arrest of the abductors.

Robert Williams said in a telephone interview that he and his brother Eric are from South Carolina but now live in the Winston-Salem area of North Carolina.

Williams described his brother as "easygoing" and "fun-spirited."

He didn't know his brother was traveling to Mexico until after the abduction hit the news. But from looking at his brother's Facebook posts, he thinks his brother did not consider the trip dangerous.

"He thought it would be fun," Williams said.

When told that his brother was among the survivors Tuesday, Williams said that when they meet, "I'll just tell him how happy I am to see him, and how glad I am that he made it through, and that I love him."

Elon Musk apologizes after mocking laid-off Twitter employee

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — If you're not told you are fired, are you really fired? At Twitter, probably. And then, sometimes, you get your job back — if you want it.

Haraldur Thorleifsson, who until recently was employed at Twitter, logged in to his computer last Sunday to do some work — only to find himself locked out, along with 200 others.

He might have figured, as others before him have in the chaotic months of layoffs and firings since Elon Musk took over the company, that he was out of a job.

Instead, after nine days of no answer from Twitter as to whether or not he was still employed, Thorleifsson decided to tweet at Musk to see if he could catch the billionaire's attention and get an answer to his Schrödinger's job situation.

"Maybe if enough people retweet you'll answer me here?" he wrote on Monday.

Eventually, he got his answer after a surreal Twitter exchange with Musk, who proceeded to quiz him about his work, question his disability and need for accommodations (Thorleifsson, who goes by "Halli," has muscular dystrophy and uses a wheelchair) and tweet that Thorleifsson has a "prominent, active Twitter account and is wealthy" and the "reason he confronted me in public was to get a big payout." While the exchange was going on, Thorleifsson said he received an email that he was no longer employed.

Late Tuesday afternoon, however, Musk had a change of heart.

"I would like to apologize to Halli for my misunderstanding of his situation. It was based on things I was told that were untrue or, in some cases, true, but not meaningful," he tweeted. "He is considering

remaining at Twitter.”

Thorleifsson did not immediately respond to a message for comment following Musk’s tweet. In an earlier email, he called the experience “surreal.”

“You had every right to lay me off. But it would have been nice to let me know!” he tweeted to Musk.

Thorleifsson, who lives in Iceland, has about 151,000 Twitter followers (Musk has over 130 million). He joined Twitter in 2021, when the company, under the prior management, acquired his startup Ueno.

He was lauded in Icelandic media for choosing to receive the purchase price in wages rather than a lump sum payout. That’s because this way, he would pay higher taxes to Iceland in support of its social services and safety net.

Thorleifsson’s next move: “I’m opening a restaurant in downtown Reykjavik very soon,” he tweeted. “It’s named after my mom.”

Twitter did not immediately respond to a message for comment.

Women sue Texas over abortion ban, say it risked their lives

By ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Five women who said they were denied abortions even when pregnancy endangered their lives are suing Texas over its abortion ban, the latest legal fight against state restrictions since the U.S. Supreme Court struck down *Roe v. Wade*.

The lawsuit filed Monday in state court said the Texas law, one of the strictest in the country, is creating confusion among doctors, who are turning away some pregnant women experiencing health complications because they fear repercussions.

“Nobody should have to wait until they are at death’s door to receive health care,” said Nancy Northup, CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights, which is providing legal representation for the women.

Similar legal challenges to abortion restrictions have arisen in states across the country since the Supreme Court overturned the landmark 1973 decision establishing a constitutional right to abortion. As clinics have shuttered in Republican-dominant states with strict abortion bans, some patients have had to cross state lines.

According to the Texas suit brought by the five women and two doctors, one woman, Amanda Zurawski, was forced to wait until she developed blood poisoning before being provided an abortion. The four others had to travel out of state to receive medical care for pregnancy-related complications after doctors recommended an abortion because of the deteriorating condition of the woman, the baby or a twin — care that could not be legally provided in Texas.

“My doctor could not intervene as long as her heart was beating or until I was sick enough for the ethics board of the hospital to consider my life at risk and permit the standard health care I needed at that point,” Zurawski said Tuesday at a news conference, recalling her pregnancy after 18 months of fertility treatment with a baby she named Willow.

The group wants clarification of the law, which they say is written vaguely and has made medical professionals wary of facing liability if the state does not consider the situation a medical emergency.

In an email Tuesday, a spokesman for Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said he is “committed to doing everything in his power to protect mothers, families, and unborn children, and he will continue to defend and enforce the laws duly enacted by the Texas Legislature.”

Doctors in the state now face felony criminal charges if they perform an abortion in all but limited cases in which the life of the patient is in danger.

John Seago, president of the anti-abortion group Texas Right to Life, said the lawsuit dealt with very specific medical situations, two of which were cases that the existing law would have protected as a medical emergency. In those cases, he said he would consider the lack of intervention medical malpractice.

“These doctors should not have waited,” Seago said, adding that Texas law does not require doctors to wait until a patient is near death.

Seago said the other three cases, dealing with disabilities of the fetus or a recommendation from a

doctor to abort one fetus to give a twin a better chance of survival, would have been prohibited from an abortion. He said there seems to be a disconnect with medical practitioners regarding what is permissible and providing clarification is important.

Doctors in Texas are afraid to speak publicly about the situation for fear of retaliation, Dr. Damla Karsan said in the lawsuit, and "widespread fear and confusion regarding the scope of Texas's abortion bans has chilled the provision of necessary obstetric care, including abortion care."

At the news conference, Anna Zargarian described how she flew from Texas to Colorado to get an abortion after her water broke prematurely. Doctors told her she could become dangerously ill and the fetus would likely not survive.

"An already extremely difficult situation had an extra layer of trauma because of medical decisions that were made by lawmakers and politicians and not by me or based on best medical practice," Zargarian said.

In reversal, Biden weighs detaining migrant families

By COLLEEN LONG and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is considering detaining migrant families who cross into the U.S. illegally as it prepares to end COVID-19 restrictions at the U.S.-Mexico border, according to U.S. officials familiar with the plans. That would be a major reversal after officials in late 2021 stopped holding families in detention facilities.

Homeland Security officials are working through how to manage an expected increase of migrants at the border once the COVID-19 restrictions that have been in place since 2020 are lifted in May. Detention is one of several ideas under discussion and nothing has been finalized, the officials said.

If families were detained, they would be held for short periods of time, perhaps just a few days, and their cases expedited through immigration court, one official said. The officials were unauthorized to speak publicly about internal deliberations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre declined to comment on "rumors" that the policy was under consideration. "I'm not saying that it is, I'm not saying that it's not," she said. She refused to say whether President Joe Biden believed that detention of families was humane.

Under current policy, families who arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border are released into the U.S. and told to appear in immigration court at a later date. During the height of the pandemic, few families were held in custody, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials are now using those facilities to hold single adults who cross the border illegally.

But the U.S. has increasingly moved to restrict migrants as it faces record numbers of people coming to the Mexico border seeking asylum and is seeing some success at bringing down the number of migrants making a dangerous and often deadly journey.

The suggestion to again detain families was met with disdain from immigration advocates, who point to studies that show how detrimental detention can be for children and families. Many said they were surprised to hear of the possibility because they had been told families would no longer be detained.

"The Biden administration is seeking to find a balance that protects the rights of those fleeing persecution and violence and the desire to enhance the orderliness of asylum processing," said Sergio Gonzales, executive director of the Immigration Hub. "Detaining families has no place in this quest. We implore the administration to reject this shameful, retrograde practice."

In 2020, Biden himself said in a tweet after reports that children were being released but not their parents: "Children should be released from ICE detention with their parents immediately. This is pretty simple, and I can't believe I have to say it: Families belong together."

A new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows some support for changing the number of immigrants and asylum-seekers allowed into the country. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults say the level of immigration and asylum-seekers should be lowered, while about 2 in 10 say it should be higher, according to the poll. About a third want the numbers to remain the same.

Illegal border crossings plummeted after Biden announced Jan. 5 that Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans would be returned to Mexico if they crossed illegally. At the same time, the administra-

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tion announced that up to 30,000 people from those four countries could come monthly if they applied online, arrived at an airport and had a financial sponsor. The Border Patrol stopped migrants 128,410 times on the Mexican border in January, down 42% from December, which was the highest month on record. February numbers have not been publicly released, but one of the officials told the AP migrants were stopped about 130,000 times.

Last month, the administration said it would generally deny asylum to migrants who show up at the U.S. southern border without first seeking protection in a country they passed through, mirroring an attempt by the Trump administration that never took effect because it was blocked in court.

But most of these efforts do not include families, which are treated differently because of the children traveling. But parents who fear detention may also start sending their children alone, and the number of unaccompanied migrants is also rising.

"I'm alarmed by news reports that the administration is considering reinstating family detention policies," said Bennie Thompson, D-Miss, the ranking member on the House Homeland Security Committee. "Not only are these policies cruel and harmful to children, but they don't prevent families from traveling to the United States."

The administration has the capacity to house roughly 3,000 people in two family detention centers in Texas.

Both the Obama and Trump administrations detained families in those facilities until their immigration cases played out, though a court order prevents the government from holding children beyond 20 days. A third detention center in Pennsylvania was shut down a few months ago.

Jean-Pierre pushed back against criticism that Biden was reinstating some of the policies of former President Donald Trump, who, among the major changes he made to the immigration system, severely curbed asylum and forcibly separated children from their parents at the border in a policy denounced worldwide as inhumane.

"A lot of people have compared what the president is doing, is either extending what Trump did or being very Trump-like," Jean-Pierre said. "That is not what is happening here."

Administration officials are ending the national emergency on May 11 that was brought on by the pandemic. Because the border restrictions known as Title 42 are tied to the national emergency, the administration is also planning to end them on May 11. The U.S. Supreme Court is weighing a Republican-led effort to leave them in place, but it has removed oral arguments on the case from its calendar.

The majority of migrants who come seeking asylum do not actually win asylum, according to data from the U.S. government. Only about 30% are deemed eligible under U.S. law, which narrowly defines who qualifies. Many people coming are seeking a better life and fleeing poverty and devastation in their home countries, but it doesn't often mean they get to stay in the U.S.

The two Texas detention centers are in Karnes City and in Dilley. Families would likely be held again in Dilley, which was used to detain families during the Obama and Trump administrations. The New York Times first reported that officials were considering detaining families again.

Everything you need to know about the 2023 Academy Awards

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Hollywood is gearing up for the 95th Academy Awards, where "Everything Everywhere All at Once" comes in the lead nominee and the film industry will hope to move past "the slap" of last year's ceremony. Here's everything you need to know about the 2023 Oscars, including when they are, where to watch the live show and this year's controversies.

WHEN ARE THE OSCARS?

The Oscars will be held Sunday, March 12, at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. The ceremony is set to begin at 8 p.m. EST and be broadcast live on ABC.

CAN YOU STREAM THE OSCARS?

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The broadcast can be streamed with a subscription to Hulu Live TV, YouTubeTV, AT&T TV and Fubo TV. Some of these services offer brief free trials. You can also stream the show on ABC.com and on the ABC app by authenticating your provider.

WHO'S HOSTING?

Jimmy Kimmel will host for the third time and his first time since 2018. That was also the last Oscars to feature a solo host. The show went hostless for several years after Kimmel's last outing. Last year, Regina Hall, Amy Schumer and Wanda Sykes hosted as a trio. In an ad for this year's show styled after "Top Gun: Maverick," Kimmel made his humble case for being the right person for the job while noting that he can't get slapped because "I cry a lot."

WHAT'S NOMINATED FOR BEST PICTURE AT THE 2023 OSCARS?

The 10 movies competing for best picture are: "All Quiet on the Western Front," "Avatar: The Way of Water," "The Banshees of Inisherin," "Elvis," "Everything Everywhere All at Once," "The Fabelmans," "Tár," "Top Gun: Maverick," "Triangle of Sadness," "Women Talking." Here's a guide to how you can watch them.

WHO'S PRESENTING?

Presenters include: Halle Bailey, Antonio Banderas, Elizabeth Banks, Jessica Chastain, John Cho, Andrew Garfield, Hugh Grant, Danai Gurira, Salma Hayek Pinault, Nicole Kidman, Florence Pugh and Sigourney Weaver. They join a previously announced group including: Riz Ahmed, Emily Blunt, Glenn Close, Jennifer Connelly, Ariana DeBose, Samuel L. Jackson, Dwayne Johnson, Michael B. Jordan, Troy Kotsur, Jonathan Majors, Melissa McCarthy, Janelle Monáe, Deepika Padukone, Questlove, Zoe Saldaña and Donnie Yen.

WHAT ELSE IS IN STORE FOR THE SHOW?

The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences has said that winners to all categories will be announced live on the show. (Last year, some categories were taped in a pre-show, something that caused an uproar among academy members.) All signs point to a full slate of musical performances, with Rihanna performing "Lift Me Up" from "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" and Kala Bhairava singing M.M. Keeravaani's "Naatu Naatu" from "RRR." No official word yet on whether Lady Gaga will sing "Hold My Hand," from "Top Gun: Maverick," during the show. On Monday, show producers announced that Lenny Kravitz will deliver the "In Memoriam" performance.

WHO ARE THE FAVORITES?

Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's indie sci-fi hit "Everything Everywhere All at Once" comes in with a leading 11 nominations. Close on its heels, though, is the Irish friends-falling-out dark comedy "The Banshees of Inisherin," with nine nods, a total matched by Netflix's WWI film "All Quiet on the Western Front." Michelle Yeoh ("Everything Everywhere All at Once") may have a slight edge on Cate Blanchett ("Tár") for best actress. Best actor is harder to call, with Brendan Fraser ("The Whale") and Austin Butler ("Elvis") in the mix. In the supporting categories, Angela Bassett ("Black Panther: Wakanda Forever") and Ke Huy Quan ("Everything Everywhere All at Once") are the frontrunners, though Jamie Lee Curtis' Screen Actors Guild Awards win may have thrown a wrench into the supporting actress category. Steven Spielberg ("The Fabelmans") may win his third best director Oscar, though the Daniels may have emerged as the frontrunners. AP Film Writers Lindsey Bahr and Jake Coyle are predicting a big haul for "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

WHAT'S BEEN CONTROVERSIAL THIS YEAR?

Aside from the usual snubs and surprises, this year's biggest to-do has been the debate surrounding Andrea Riseborough's unexpected nomination for best actress. Riseborough was nominated for the little-seen Texas-set drama "To Leslie" after many A-list stars rallied around her performance. When two other best-actress contenders — Danielle Deadwyler ("Till") and Viola Davis ("Woman King") — were snubbed, some saw that as a reflection of racial bias in the film industry. The academy launched an inquiry into the star-studded, grassroots campaign for Riseborough but found no reason to rescind her nomination.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR?

Just the reading of the title to one of this year's short film nominees should prompt a wave of giggles. John Williams ("The Fabelmans"), up for best score, is the oldest nominee ever, at 90 years old. After

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historic back-to-back best-director wins by Chloé Zhao ("Nomadland") and Jane Campion ("The Power of the Dog"), no women were nominated this year for best director. Also don't expect to see Will Smith at the Oscars anytime soon. After striking Chris Rock at last year's ceremony, Smith was banned by the film academy from attending for 10 years. In a live Netflix special on Saturday, Rock finally punched back at Smith with a blistering stand-up set about the incident.

'Boy Meets World' star Ben Savage enters US House race in LA

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Actor Ben Savage, who starred as a child in the ABC teen sitcom "Boy Meets World," is running for a U.S. House seat in California, marking his latest attempt to make the jump from Hollywood to politics.

Savage, a Democrat, said in an Instagram post Monday that "it's time to restore faith in government" and that voters want leaders "unhindered by political divisions and special interests."

"I firmly believe in standing up for what is right, ensuring equality and expanding opportunities for all," he wrote.

Savage joins a crowded field for the seat held by Democratic U.S. Rep. Adam Schiff, who is running for U.S. Senate. Other candidates include former Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer and Democratic state Assemblywoman Laura Friedman.

The heavily Democratic 30th District includes a swath of Los Angeles, including Hollywood and the trendy neighborhoods of Silver Lake and Echo Park, and also cuts through neighboring cities including Pasadena, Glendale and West Hollywood.

Savage starred in "Boy Meets World" for seven seasons in the '90s, in which viewers saw his character Cory Matthews go from awkward sixth grader to a college student married to his high-school sweetheart.

He ran for a seat on the West Hollywood City Council last year but only garnered about 6% of the vote.

He said on his website that his priorities include working for safer streets, and addressing homelessness and affordable housing.

"I support a robust public safety presence to keep the community safe and vibrant," Savage wrote. "We need to support our law enforcement officers and provide them with the resources they need to keep businesses, residents and visitors safe."

He added that he supports "checks and balances to root out corruption" in law enforcement, and working to improve relations between police and underserved communities.

US sues to block JetBlue from buying Spirit Airlines

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

The Biden administration sued to block JetBlue Airways' \$3.8 billion purchase of Spirit Airlines, saying Tuesday that the deal would reduce competition and drive up air fares for consumers.

The Justice Department said the tie-up would especially hurt cost-conscious travelers who depend on Spirit to find cheaper options to JetBlue and other airlines.

Attorney General Merrick Garland held a news conference to announce the antitrust lawsuit — a sign of the importance that the administration places on stopping further consolidation in the airline industry.

"If allowed to proceed, this merger will limit choices and drive up ticket prices for passengers across the country" and "eliminate Spirit's unique and disruptive role in the industry," he said.

The Justice Department lawsuit, filed in federal district court in Boston, stressed that the deal would mean the end of the nation's biggest "ultra-low-cost carrier." Those are airlines that generally provide the cheapest fares but also tend to charge more fees.

The Justice Department lawyers said Spirit's demise would eliminate about half of all ultra-low-cost seats in the market. It cited a Spirit estimate that average fares fall 17% when it enters a route, and a JetBlue calculation that fares rise 30% when Spirit leaves a route.

The airlines vowed to continue fighting to salvage their agreement.

JetBlue CEO Robin Hayes said the merger would boost competition by making his New York-based airline

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bigger and better able to go up against American, United, Delta and Southwest. He blamed the DOJ for airline consolidation.

"We believe the DOJ has got it wrong on the law here and misses the point that this merger will create a national low-fare, high-quality competitor to the Big Four carriers which — thanks to their own DOJ-approved mergers — control about 80% of the U.S. market," Hayes said.

JetBlue and Florida-based Spirit have anticipated a legal challenge for weeks. The Justice Department had previously requested additional documents and depositions about JetBlue's proposal to buy Spirit, the nation's biggest budget airline. Negotiations over a possible settlement failed.

As signals grew stronger that the government would challenge the tie-up, JetBlue launched a pre-emptive campaign to make its argument that the deal would help consumers by creating a stronger competitor to the four larger carriers.

Hayes said he was disappointed but not surprised at the lawsuit.

"We said when we got the offer approved by the Spirit shareholders last year that we didn't think we would close until the first half of 2024, expecting a trial," he said on "CBS Mornings."

The lawsuit is the latest by the Biden administration to seek to block mergers in industries including health care, sugar refining, video gaming and publishing. It has already lost the health care and sugar battles.

"They don't seem to be afraid of losing cases. They're hoping that if they win some, that will set a precedent and help them deter other mergers that they view as anti-competitive," said Florian Ederer, an antitrust expert at Yale University. He thinks the government has a strong case against the JetBlue deal.

The Justice Department was under pressure from Democratic lawmakers and consumer advocates who complained about a wave of earlier mergers. In 2021, the administration took a more aggressive approach, suing to kill a limited partnership between JetBlue and American Airlines in the Northeast. A federal judge in Boston is expected to issue a ruling soon, after a non-jury trial last fall.

JetBlue and Spirit would control a little over 9% of the domestic air-travel market, far smaller than American, Delta, United and Southwest. JetBlue executives repeatedly said their deal was not like Pepsi buying Coca-Cola — a line that Hayes repeated Tuesday.

However, their concentration is much higher on certain routes in the East. The Justice Department lawsuit said the two account for nearly 50% of the traffic between Boston and Miami and Fort Lauderdale, and nearly 90% between Boston and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The Justice Department sued to block the last megadeal, American's 2013 merger with US Airways, then reached a settlement that required the carriers to give up some gates and takeoff and landing slots at several major airports. Before that, the government allowed Delta to buy Northwest, United to merge with Continental, and it later let Southwest buy AirTran.

Last year, JetBlue torpedoed a deal between Spirit and Frontier Airlines, then beat Frontier in a bidding war. Frontier CEO Barry Biffle argued that regulators would block a JetBlue-Spirit deal but not a tie-up with his airline, a similar discount carrier.

To counter Biffle's argument, JetBlue agreed to pay Spirit shareholders \$400 million plus \$70 million to the company if the merger dies for antitrust reasons.

The largest union for flight attendants, the Association of Flight Attendants, reiterated its support for the merger Tuesday, which it said would lift pay and benefits for Spirit crews that it represents.

But the American Economic Liberties Project, which opposes corporate consolidation, praised the Justice Department for seeking to block the deal, saying it would let JetBlue "gobble up a low-cost competitor" and boost prices.

New York, Massachusetts and the District of Columbia joined the federal lawsuit. Florida dropped its review of the merger after the airlines agreed to expand in Fort Lauderdale, Orlando and other airports in the state.

Coming soon: Reese's Cups, chocolate bars made from plants

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

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Reese's Peanut Butter Cups are getting the vegan treatment.

The Hershey Co. said Tuesday that Reese's Plant Based Peanut Butter Cups, which go on sale this month, will be its first vegan chocolates sold nationally. A second plant-based offering, Hershey's Plant Based Extra Creamy with Almonds and Sea Salt, will follow in April.

The chocolates are made with oats instead of milk, Hershey said.

Hershey has experimented with vegan chocolate before. It sold an oat-based chocolate bar called Oat Made in some test markets starting in 2021. But the new products will be the first sold throughout the U.S. under the "Plant Based" label.

Hershey said consumers want choice and are looking for products they consider healthier or with fewer ingredients, including reduced sugar and plant-based options. Hershey also introduced an organic version of Reese's Cups in February 2021.

Younger consumers, in particular, are looking to reduce consumption of animal-based products, says Euromonitor, a market research firm. In a 2021 survey, Euromonitor found that 54% of Generation Z consumers were restricting animal-based products from their diets, compared to 34% of Baby Boomers.

Nestle has sold its KitKat V, a vegan KitKat bar, in Europe since 2021, while Cadbury sells a vegan chocolate bar in the United Kingdom. But so far, U.S. vegan chocolate options have generally been limited to premium brands, like Lindt, or organic chocolatiers like Hu Kitchen.

Hershey said it developed plant-based versions of Reese's Cups and Hershey bars __ some of its most popular products __ because there's a dearth of mainstream plant-based chocolates in the U.S. market.

The plant-based versions will cost more. Hershey wouldn't share details because it said retailers set final prices. But Rite Aid lists a 1.4-ounce package of two plant-based Reese's Cups at \$2.49; that's about \$1 more than consumers would pay for a regular package. Hershey charges a similar premium for organic versions of its Reese Cups, which went on sale in 2021.

And ditching the dairy won't cut calories. While Hershey didn't release all of the nutritional facts, the 1.4-ounce package of plant-based Reese's Cups have 210 calories; that's the same number of calories as a 1.5-ounce package of traditional Reese's Cups.

Powell signals increased rate hikes if economy stays strong

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve could increase the size of its interest rate hikes and raise borrowing costs to higher levels than previously projected if evidence continues to point to a robust economy and persistently high inflation, Chair Jerome Powell told a Senate panel Tuesday.

"The latest economic data have come in stronger than expected, which suggests that the ultimate level of interest rates is likely to be higher than previously anticipated," Powell testified to the Senate Banking Committee. "If the totality of the data were to indicate that faster tightening is warranted, we would be prepared to increase the pace of rate hikes."

Powell's comments reflect a sharp change in the economic outlook since the Fed's most recent policy meeting in early February. At that meeting, the central bank raised its key rate by just a quarter-point, downshifting after a half-point rise in December and four three-quarter-point hikes before that.

The Fed chair's remarks Tuesday raised the real possibility that the Fed will increase its benchmark rate by a half-percentage point at its next meeting March 21-22. Over the past year, the central bank has raised its key rate, which affects many consumer and business loans, eight times.

At their forthcoming meeting, Fed officials will also issue updated forecasts for how high they expect their benchmark rate to ultimately reach. In December, they forecast that it would reach about 5.1% later this year. Powell's latest remarks suggested that the Fed could raise it even higher. Futures pricing indicates that investors now expect it to rise a half-point further, to 5.6%.

The Fed chair's warning of potentially more aggressive moves darkened the mood on Wall Street, where stock prices tumbled in the hours after Powell began speaking. In late-day trading, the broad S&P 500 index was down a sizable 1.6%.

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"The presumption that's been established is that they will hike (a half-point) in March, unless they are convinced otherwise," said Derek Tang, an economist at LHMeyer, an economic consulting firm.

The prospect of increasingly high borrowing costs tends to generate concern among economists and investors. Rising rates can not only cool consumer and business spending, weaken growth and slow inflation; they can also send the economy sliding into a recession.

During Tuesday's hearing, Democratic senators stressed their belief that today's high inflation is due mainly to the combination of continued supply chain disruptions, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and higher corporate profit margins. Several argued that further rate hikes would throw millions of Americans out of work.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Democrat of Massachusetts, noted that Fed officials have projected that the unemployment rate will reach 4.6% by the end of this year, from 3.4% now. Historically, when the jobless rate has risen by at least 1 percentage point, a recession has followed, she noted.

"If you could speak directly to the 2 million hardworking people who have decent jobs today, who you're planning to get fired over the next year, what would you say to them?" Warren asked.

"We actually don't think that we need to see a sharp or enormous increase in unemployment to get inflation under control," Powell responded. "We're not targeting any of that."

By contrast, the committee's Republicans mainly blamed President Joe Biden's policies for high inflation and argued that if government spending were cut, inflation would slow.

"If Congress reduced the rate of growth in its spending, and reduced the rate of growth in its debt accumulation, it would make your job easier in reducing inflation?" Sen. John Kennedy, Republican of Louisiana, asked.

"I don't think fiscal policy right now is a big factor driving inflation," Powell responded. But he also acknowledged that if Congress reduced the deficit, that "could" help slow price increases.

Powell walked back some of the optimistic comments about declining inflation he had made after the Fed's Feb. 1 meeting, when he noted that "the disinflationary process has started" and he referred to "disinflation" — a broad and steady slowdown in inflation — multiple times. At that time, year-over-year consumer price growth had slowed for six straight months.

But after that meeting, the latest reading of the Fed's preferred inflation measure showed that consumer prices rose from December to January by the most in seven months. And reports on hiring, consumer spending and the broader economy have also indicated that growth remains healthy.

Such economic figures, Powell said Tuesday, "have partly reversed the softening trends that we had seen in the data just a month ago."

The Fed chair also said that inflation "has been moderating in recent months" but added that "the process of getting inflation back down to 2 percent has a long way to go and is likely to be bumpy." Inflation, as measured year over year, has slowed from its peak in June of 9.1% to 6.4%.

Several Fed officials said last week that they would favor raising the Fed's key rate above the 5.1% level they had projected in December if growth and inflation stay elevated.

Powell noted that so far, most of the slowdown in inflation reflects an unraveling of supply chains that have allowed more furniture, clothes, semiconductors and other physical goods to reach U.S. shores. By contrast, inflation pressures remain entrenched in numerous areas of the economy's vast service sector.

Rental and housing costs, for example, remain a significant driver of inflation. At the same time, the cost of a new apartment lease is growing much more slowly, a trend that should reduce housing inflation by mid-year, Powell has said.

But the prices of many services — from dining out to hotel rooms to haircuts — are still rising rapidly, with little sign that the Fed's rate hikes are having an effect. Fed officials say the costs of those services mainly reflect rising wages and salaries, which companies often pass on to their customers in the form of higher prices.

As a result, the Fed's monetary policy report to Congress, which it publishes in conjunction with the chair's testimony, said that quelling inflation will likely require "softer labor market conditions" — a euphemism for fewer job openings and more layoffs.

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Senators from both parties also asked Powell about the Fed's view on cryptocurrencies and what steps it has taken as a financial regulator on digital assets.

"What we see is, you know, quite a lot of turmoil," Powell said. "We see fraud, we see a lack of transparency, we see run risk, lots and lots of things like that."

As a result, Powell said, the Fed is encouraging the banks it oversees to take "great care in the ways that they engage with the whole crypto space."

At the same time, he said, "We have to be open to the idea that somewhere in there, there's technology that can be featured in productive innovation that makes people's lives better."

Russian gallery shows art by 'Merchant of Death' freed by US

MOSCOW (AP) — Viktor Bout, a former Russian arms dealer who was released from prison in the U.S. in a swap for WNBA star Brittney Griner in December, unveiled an exhibition of his artworks at a Moscow gallery on Tuesday.

Bout, widely known abroad as the "Merchant of Death," was convicted in 2011 on terrorism charges with prosecutors saying that he was ready to sell up to \$20 million in weapons, including surface-to-air missiles to shoot down U.S. helicopters.

He strongly denied the charges and proclaimed his innocence, describing himself as a legitimate entrepreneur who didn't sell any weapons. Russian officials have cast him as a victim of a nefarious U.S. sting operation and demanded his release for many years.

When Moscow and Washington made a deal to swap him for Griner in December, Bout was held in a medium-security facility in Marion, Illinois and had not been scheduled to be released until 2029.

After his return to Moscow, Bout, 56, quickly became a member of the Kremlin-backed Liberal Democratic Party but has dodged questions about a possible political career.

Bout's art exhibition features a wide gamut of styles and subjects — from portraits of Soviet-era movie stars to warplanes to animals. Most of his drawings and paintings are done in a realistic manner, but there are also some attempts at abstract composition.

The exhibition includes personal objects, photos and a floor plan of his cell in the U.S. prison.

"When you are surrounded by absolutely grey walls topped by barbed wire and when you don't see the horizon for a long time, it's hard," Bout said Tuesday at his exhibition. "The deprivation of such visual stimuli was a challenge for me. Drawing helped me overcome all that."

He added that his experience taught him that "life can always change drastically."

"You must not give up, you must do everything to the end, and you must remain faithful to your fate despite any difficulties," Bout said.

FDA: Two more eyedrop brands recalled due to risks

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. health officials are alerting consumers about two more recalls of eyedrops due to contamination risks that could lead to vision problems and serious injury.

The announcements follow a recall last month of eyedrops made in India that were linked to an outbreak of drug-resistant infections. One person died and at least five others had permanent vision loss.

There's no indication the latest recalls are related to those products.

The Food and Drug Administration posted separate recall notices for certain eyedrops distributed by Pharmedica and Apotex after the companies said they are voluntarily pulling several lots of their products from the market. Both companies said the recalls were conducted in consultation with the FDA.

Pharmedica on Friday said it is recalling two lots of Purely Soothing 15% MSM Drops due to problems "that could result in blindness." The over-the-counter drops are designed to treat eye irritation. The Phoenix-based company said consumers should immediately stop using the drops and return them to the place they were purchased.

The recall affects nearly 2,900 bottles, according to the company. The drops were manufactured in Arizona.

Last week, the FDA posted a separate recall announcement from Apotex recalling six lots of prescription eyedrops used to treat a form of glaucoma. The company said it launched the recall after finding cracks in a handful of bottle caps.

The drops are distributed as Brimonidine Tartrate Ophthalmic Solution, 0.15% and were sold between last April through February.

Apotex said in an email that the eyedrops were manufactured in Canada. The company hasn't received any reports of injuries related to the drops.

Israeli military caught up in divide over Netanyahu's plan

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Shraga Tichover is hanging up his fatigues. After more than three decades as a reservist in the Israeli military, the paratrooper says he will no longer put his life on the line for a country slipping toward autocracy.

Tichover is part of a wave of unprecedented opposition from within the ranks of the Israeli military to a contentious government plan to overhaul the judiciary. Like Tichover, some reservists are refusing to show up for duty and former commanders are defending their actions as a natural response to the impending change.

"The values of this country are going to change. I am not able to serve the military of a state that is not a democracy," said Tichover, a 53-year-old volunteer reservist who has served in southern Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The typically taboo talk of defying military orders underlines how deeply the overhaul has divided Israel and is now tearing at what Israeli Jews see as their most respected institution, the military. Concerns are growing that the protest could trickle down to young conscripts as well.

In a declaration that has sent shock waves through the country, three dozen reservist fighter pilots said they wouldn't show up for training on Wednesday in protest. The airmen are seen as the cream of the military's personnel and irreplaceable elements of many of Israel's battle plans.

After appeals from top officials, the pilots announced they would show up to their base — but only for a dialogue with their commanders, Israeli media reported. "We have full confidence in our commanders," the reports quoted the pilots as saying in a letter.

The military's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi, reportedly warned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week that the reservists' protest risks harming the military's capabilities. Halevi and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant met late Tuesday with a group of senior reservists to discuss the crisis.

"The army cannot operate without the reservists," Halevi told them. But, he said, "insubordination is a red line."

For Israel's Jewish majority, most of whom must serve in the military, the army is a source of unity and a rite of passage. Military service is an important launching pad into civilian life and the workforce.

After completing three years of mandatory service, many men continue in the reserves until their 40s, when service becomes voluntary. Most of those threatening to halt their service are volunteers, protecting them from potential punishment.

Recognizing the threat to its stability, the military has pleaded to be kept out of the heated public discourse. But it's become central to the debate over what kind of Israel will emerge after the overhaul.

Netanyahu, a former soldier in an elite unit, and his government are pushing forward on a plan to weaken the Supreme Court and limit the independence of the judiciary. His allies say the changes are meant to streamline governance, while critics say the plan will upend Israel's system of checks and balances and slide the country toward authoritarianism. They also say Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption, is motivated by a personal grudge and has a conflict of interest.

The overhaul, which is moving ahead in parliament, has sparked an outcry from business leaders and legal officials. Tens of thousands of protesters have been taking to the streets each week.

Not everyone identifies with the soldiers. Critics say the military, as the enforcer of Israel's rule over

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millions of Palestinians in an open-ended occupation, has subjugated another people and eroded the country's democratic ideals. The reserve units now protesting, including pilots and intelligence units, have been behind deadly strikes or surveillance against Palestinians.

Israel's own Palestinian minority has largely stayed on the sidelines of the anti-government protests, in part because of Israel's treatment of their Palestinian brethren in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

But Jewish Israelis see the military as a pillar of security in the face of myriad threats. Israel is mired in a bloody round of violence with Palestinians and archenemy Iran is blazing ahead with its nuclear program. Israel says Iran is developing a nuclear bomb — a charge that Tehran denies.

Those developments have not stopped the creeping challenge within the military. Israel's pool of reservists are the backbone of the force when security crises erupt.

Ehud Barak, a former military chief of staff, defense minister and prime minister, has said it would be acceptable to defy orders from what he calls a dictatorial regime. Dan Halutz, another former military chief, said soldiers won't agree to become "mercenaries for a dictator."

In addition to the protesting pilots, hundreds of reservists have signed letters promising not to serve if the overhaul passes.

"Hit the emergency brake now," reservists from the 8200 intelligence unit warned the government in a letter last week. Many 8200 graduates join the country's booming tech sector, also a fierce opponent of the overhaul.

A mass protest movement demonstrating against the overhaul has its own reservist contingent. A new group, "Do it Yourself," is calling on secular families to refuse to allow their children to serve in the occupied West Bank. A group of soldiers has asked permission to join the mass protests.

Activists warn that the overhaul is threatening to hurt future morale.

"The generations after us will not follow us," said Eyal Naveh, 47, a reservist from an elite unit and protest leader. "What will a person who halted his reserve duty tell his son? To go to the army or not?"

Naveh said reservists are also concerned the changes will leave soldiers exposed to war crimes charges at international courts. One of Israel's defenses against war crimes accusations is that it has an independent legal system capable of investigating any potential wrongdoing.

Debate has emerged in the past over whether soldiers ideologically opposed to an order should refuse to carry it out, particularly over the evacuation of Jews from settlements. But the mere suggestion of insubordination is rare.

Tichover, the volunteer reservist, said he struggled during his service with what he called "irrational" orders that harmed Palestinians, like being told to damage Palestinian cars. He said he found ways to skirt around such orders but never overtly defied them.

Late on Monday, Netanyahu met with members of the paramilitary border police force at a base in the occupied West Bank, telling them there was no room for politics in the military.

"There is no place for refusal now, and there won't be a place in the future," he said.

Reflecting the military's public standing, opposition leaders have also spoken out against the calls to defy orders.

"Do not lend a hand to insubordination," said Benny Gantz, an opposition leader and former military chief.

The looming threat to the military isn't the reservists' protest, said Idit Shafran Gittleman, an expert on the military at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank. She says the overhaul could lead to a constitutional crisis over who is in charge.

"There will be chaos," she said. "The military won't know who it must take orders from."

Man faces execution in death of estranged wife, her daughter

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A Texas inmate is facing scheduled execution Tuesday evening for fatally stabbing his estranged wife and drowning her 6-year-old daughter in a bathtub nearly 14 years ago.

Gary Green, 51, is set to receive a lethal injection for the September 2009 deaths of Lovetta Armstead,

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32, and her daughter, Jazzmen Montgomery, at their home in Dallas.

The girl's father, Ray Montgomery, said he is not cheering for Green's execution but sees it as the justice system at work.

"It's justice for the way my daughter was tortured. It's justice for the way that Lovetta was murdered," Montgomery said.

As of late Tuesday morning, Green's attorneys had not filed any appeals seeking to stop his execution at the state penitentiary in Huntsville, Texas. His attorney did not return several calls and emails seeking comment.

In prior appeals, Green's attorneys claimed he was intellectually disabled and has had a lifelong history of psychiatric disorders.

"These impairments likely rendered (Green) unable to form the requisite intent to commit capital murder," Green's attorneys wrote in 2018.

Those appeals were rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court and lower appeals courts.

The high court has prohibited the death penalty for the intellectually disabled, but not for people with serious mental illness.

Authorities said Green killed the two after Armstead sought to annul their marriage.

On the day of the killings, Armstead had written two letters to Green, telling him that although she loved him, she had "to do what's best for me."

In his own letter, which was angry and rambling, Green expressed the belief that Armstead and her children were involved in a plot against him.

"You asked to see the monster so here he is the monster you made me ... They will be 5 lives taken today me being the 5th," Green wrote.

Armstead was stabbed more than two dozen times while Green drowned Jazzmen in the home's bathtub.

Authorities said Green also intended to kill Armstead's two other children, then 9-year-old Jerrett and 12-year-old Jerome. Green stabbed the younger boy but both survived.

"Told (Green) because we're too little to die and we won't tell anybody about it," the 9-year-old told jurors in testimony about how he convinced Green to spare their lives.

Josh Healy, one of the prosecutors with the Dallas County District Attorney's Office that convicted Green, said the boys were incredibly brave.

Green "was an evil guy. It was one of the worst cases I've ever been a part of," said Healy, who is now a defense attorney in Dallas.

Montgomery said he still has a close relationship with Armstead's two sons. He said both lead productive lives and one has a daughter who looks like Jazzmen.

"They still suffer a lot I think," said Montgomery, who is a special education English teacher.

In recent years, Montgomery and Jerome Armstead have participated in domestic violence seminars. Montgomery said he's tried to help other people recognize the signs of domestic violence, signs he didn't see before Lovetta Armstead and his daughter were killed.

"Just being able to go out and help and spread awareness has been like therapy to me," he said.

Montgomery, who is a deacon at his church in Dallas, said he's continued to live his life like his daughter is still here, including throwing her a party every birthday. He also had a high school graduation party for her, including a parade at her gravesite and a backyard barbecue with family.

"That was my way of dealing with it, to make it feel like she's still here. I prayed over her grave one day and I told her I would never let her name die down," Montgomery said.

Green's execution is the first of two scheduled in Texas this week. Another inmate, Arthur Brown Jr., is set to be executed Thursday.

Green would be the fourth inmate in Texas and the eighth in the U.S. put to death this year.

Green is one of six Texas death row inmates who are part of a lawsuit seeking to stop the state's prison system from using what they allege are expired and unsafe execution drugs. Despite a civil court judge in Austin preliminarily agreeing with the claims, three of the inmates have been executed this year.

Angela Bassett, Oscar nominee, is just doing her thing

By LESLIE AMBRIZ Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Angela Bassett has a presence that feels warm and inviting but also demands your respect. The actor moves like true Hollywood royalty, knowing her worth, dedicated to her craft and remaining confident yet humble throughout a decades-spanning, award-winning career.

On a Tuesday in January, Bassett would wake up just before 3:45 a.m., unable to fall back asleep. In just two hours, she would hear Riz Ahmed announce her name as a best supporting actress Oscar nominee for her performance as Queen Ramonda in "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever."

Bassett remembers turning to wake up her husband, actor Courtney B. Vance ("I couldn't experience that alone and then tell him about it later," she said), and immediately receiving a text from fellow Oscar nominee and award-winning costume designer Ruth E. Carter.

"It was the first nomination and the first name," she recalled. "I gasped, and that was a shock, that sort of 'Whoa! Already? You know, give a girl a minute.'"

Carter and Bassett have worked together at least five times on various projects and are longtime friends.

"I was glad to be there for her," Bassett said of the "brilliant and undeniable" Carter, who won an Oscar in 2019 for the first "Black Panther" movie.

Carter shared the same sentiment about Bassett, saying she's beyond happy to see her friend celebrated on such a large scale.

"Well, I am beyond happy for her. I remember when I received the Oscar. She came right up, and she was so full of joy and happiness for me," said Carter at the African American Film Critics Association Awards on March 1.

"And I feel the same way for her," Carter continued. "Having seen her journey for over 25 years and having had started with her on 'What's Love Got to Do with It' and how committed she is to her craft, I think that she is due for her flowers, and I'm so excited to be here with her to witness it and share in the love."

As Queen Ramonda, Bassett played the mother of Chadwick Boseman's T'challa. She called working with him the "highlight of her career." She also made history as her Oscar nomination is Marvel's first in an acting category.

"I'm absolutely thrilled about it. I didn't know that — that was something that I learned just a couple of weeks ago," Bassett said at February's Oscar nominees luncheon. "So, you know, firsts are always nice and hopefully it's the first of many more."

Bassett has appeared in cult classic and tentpole films alike, including the late John Singleton's "Boyz n the Hood" and Forest Whitaker's "Waiting to Exhale."

While attending the Santa Barbara Film Festival earlier this year, Bassett said that her time as Katherine Jackson in the 1992 series "The Jacksons: An American Dream" prepared her to portray Tina Turner. Her turn as the singer in "What's Love Got to Do With It" netted the actor her first Oscar nomination, for best actress.

Nearly 30 years later, Bassett has been engulfed in a whirlwind of award shows and press junkets in preparation for the Oscars. Bassett says she's "holding on" amid the quick pace of awards season and has a sound machine that lulls her "off to peaceful dreams" as she crosses the town from one red carpet to the next.

Earlier this year, she won the Golden Globe for best supporting actress. She's also become a viral meme thanks to Ariana DeBose proclaiming that "Angela Bassett did the thing!" in a BAFTA performance. Bassett also recently took home the NAACP Image Award for Entertainer of the Year.

While Bassett is excited about her Oscar nomination, she acknowledges the Academy's failure to include more artists of color and women in their list of nominees. She advises that Academy members should expand their frame of reference when considering films and performances.

"But I would say first and foremost, see an array of movies. Whether you think you can relate to it or not, or it looks like you or not, or the stories seem intriguing or not, give all a chance because it's — well, it's easy, and it's possible to miss very, very fine performances," Bassett told the AP. "But frame of reference is everything. So, have a wide and open frame of reference."

As March 12 approaches, Bassett's supporters wait to see if this is the year that she becomes forever known as Academy Award-winning actor Angela Bassett. But where would she display her Oscar if that moment does arrive?

"You know, something like that looks good anywhere," Bassett said. "Maybe it'll have to take a little tour, see where it wants to land. Right in my hand, near my heart."

Ukraine military identifies soldier seen in grisly war video

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A man who appeared to be shot dead by Russian-speakers in a short video was tentatively identified Tuesday as a missing Ukrainian soldier while the footage circulated widely on Ukrainian social media and caused an uproar.

The country's chief prosecutor announced a criminal investigation into the killing, and human rights chief Dmytro Lubinets argued that it was a violation of the Geneva Conventions.

Senior Ukrainian officials alleged, without providing further evidence, that the man was an unarmed prisoner of war killed by Russian soldiers. In the video, the man did not appear to be armed.

The 30th Mechanized Brigade on its Facebook page named the man as Tymofii Shadura. The identification is based on preliminary information and is not final, it said.

Shadura has been missing for just over a month, since disappearing during bitter fighting in the Bakhmut area of eastern Ukraine, the post said. The city has been a combat hot spot as the war extends into its second year.

His identity is to be confirmed once the body is returned from a Russian-occupied area, the post added, though it did not say when that might happen.

The Ukrainian military's general staff gave the same name for the dead soldier, saying it was "according to preliminary information."

In the 12-second video, the man in combat fatigues is seen in a wooded area smoking a cigarette.

Someone off-camera is heard speaking in Russian. The man then says "Glory to Ukraine" and is hit by a volley of gunshots, falling into a hole in the ground, with an off-camera voice saying "Die," followed by an expletive.

The Associated Press could not verify the video's authenticity, any details about when it was recorded or anything about the people involved.

Questions sent by the AP to the Russian military about the clip did not immediately receive a reply.

The video circulated widely on social media in Ukraine and unleashed an outcry.

In his nightly video address Monday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said: "I want us all together, in unity, to respond to (the soldier's) words: "Glory to the hero! Glory to heroes! Glory to Ukraine!" And we will find the killers."

Moscow also has expressed suspicion about the treatment of Russian prisoners of war by Ukrainian forces.

Last November, Ukraine said it would open an investigation into video footage that circulated on Russian social media, which Moscow alleged shows Ukrainian soldiers killing Russian troops who may have been trying to surrender after one of the men seemingly refused to lay down his weapon and opened fire.

In other developments:

— Ukraine and Russia completed another exchange of captives. Ukrainian presidential aide Andriy Yermak reported that 130 Ukrainian soldiers returned from Russian captivity, most of them with severe injuries. Russia's Defense Ministry said 90 Russian servicemen were returned from territory controlled by Kyiv. Since the beginning of the war, 1,993 people have been returned from captivity, according to Lubinets.

— U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was on his way to Ukraine for a meeting Wednesday in Kyiv with Zelenskyy. The two are due to discuss the extension of an agreement that allows Ukraine to export grain from its Black Sea ports and permits Russia to export food and fertilizers.

— Ukraine's presidential office reported Tuesday that at least one civilian was killed and 11 more were wounded in Ukraine over the previous 24 hours. Fierce battles continued in the region for the key city

of Bakhmut, where fewer than 4,000 civilians remain from a prewar population of 70,000, according to Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk.

— A parliamentary delegation from Hungary said Tuesday during a visit to Denmark that it supports Sweden's NATO membership. Some Hungarian lawmakers had balked at supporting the NATO membership applications by Sweden and Finland, due to what they called "blatant lies" from Stockholm and Helsinki on the state of Hungary's democracy.

Live free or dry: No buying booze on Amtrak in New Hampshire

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Riders on an Amtrak train that runs from Maine to Boston will soon have to hold off on buying alcoholic beverages during the 35-mile stretch of the trip that goes through New Hampshire.

The Amtrak Downeaster takes passengers 145 miles from Brunswick, Maine, to Boston. The train includes a cafe car that serves alcohol.

However, the New Hampshire Liquor Commission has told the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority that the train can't serve alcohol during the New Hampshire portion of the journey.

The change is set to go on the books on March 20, the Portland Press Herald reported. It stems from a New Hampshire law that forbids the serving of alcohol that hasn't been purchased in the state.

The company that provides the train's food and beverage service, Mansfield, Massachusetts-based NexDine Hospitality, buys its alcoholic drinks in Maine for the 145-mile route, the newspaper reported.

The train brings hundreds of thousands of passengers to Boston every year, and its advertising sometimes plays up the ability to relax with a drink during the ride. It's a popular alternative for sports and concerts because it terminates steps from TD Garden, one of New England's biggest performance venues.

'Oh my daughter': Volunteer medic, 29, buried in Ukraine

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

VINNYTSIA, Ukraine (AP) — As the mother's cries of anguish pierced the cold morning air, mourners who had fought back tears could hold them no longer.

"Oh Yana, oh my daughter," Olena Rikhlitska howled. "My baby, my little one."

Her only child, 29-year-old Yana Rikhlitska, lay in a coffin before her, the younger woman's blonde hair still in the tight braids she adopted when she voluntarily joined the Ukrainian army as a medic late last year.

Just over a week ago, Associated Press journalists filmed Yana Rikhlitska as she helped treat wounded soldiers in a field hospital outside Bakhmut, which Russian forces have pulverized during a three-sided assault to seize the city in eastern Ukraine.

A few days later she was dead. Rikhlitska and another medic were killed by shelling as they shuttled between the field hospital and the front line.

As friends, colleagues and relatives gathered Tuesday in her home city of Vinnytsia in central Ukraine to bid her a final farewell, they remembered a person full of vitality and spurred by a life-long drive to help others.

"She was really friendly and kind," said Viktor Fateyev, 39, a colleague from the IT company where she worked in the human resources department. "She was like a mother to everyone; she was the focus point everyone gathered around."

Rikhlitska was in Brazil just before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022. She spent a few months in the South American country practicing capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial art, Fateyev said, clutching a bunch of yellow tulips as he waited to pay his respects at the funeral.

She flew home after the invasion, he said, and straight away began fundraising and working as a volunteer for troops to help the Ukrainian defense effort. It wasn't long before she decided to become a front-line medic.

He spotted her in the AP video when it aired, Fateyev said, and posted it in a group chat of her co-workers. "Everyone was so excited," he said. "And then, the next day..." he trailed off.

Tetiana Obratsova, 30, a member of a volunteer combat medic group who met Rikhlitska in September,

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said Rikhlitska ferried humanitarian aid to Bakhmut even before she became a medic. Russia has been trying to capture the city for six months.

"She did all that she could, right from the start of the full-scale war," Obraztsova said.

Fellow volunteer Anastasia Muzyka, 29, recalled Rikhlitska as bright, kind and indefatigable.

"She was fiery, in a good way. She was so dedicated. It was like she was never tired," Muzyka said. In combat, eventually even soldiers need to rest, she added, "but not Yara. She was always there, helping everyone."

It was during her volunteer work in August that she met her future husband, Oleksandr, who was in the Ukrainian army. Amid the din of war, their love blossomed, and the couple married on Dec. 31, 2022.

"She was fire, the fire that cannot be extinguished," said Oleksandr, who would only give his first name.

Childhood friend Snizhana Zaliubivska, 28, remembered Rikhlitska displaying a desire to help even as a little girl. The two had lost touch in recent years, but Zaliubivska was devastated to hear of her friend's death.

"It wasn't a surprise that she was volunteering. She was a true patriot of the country," she said. "She would never refuse anyone, she was always helping everyone who would ask."

Draped with the blue and yellow Ukrainian flag, Rikhlitska's coffin was transported to the military section of the local cemetery and opened once more. Ashen-faced, her mother gently stroked her daughter's cheek, and kissed her one last time.

"No, no!" Olena Rikhlitska sobbed as the coffin was carried to the grave and lowered to the sound of a gun salute. Only the support of her husband, Mykola, and another relative prevented her from sinking to the ground.

Behind them, row upon row of Ukrainian flags fluttered above the graves of the war dead, snapping in the breeze.

What to do if you're concerned you might be laid off

By ADRIANA MORGA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The job market in the U.S. remains strong overall, but recent high-profile layoffs at technology and media companies and predictions of a recession later this year may have you thinking about job security.

If you're worried you could be laid off — or if you've lost your job — here are recommendations from experts:

IF YOU ARE CONCERNED YOU MAY BE LAID OFF

START SAVING

It's crucial to start building an emergency fund even when you feel secure at your job but especially if you think you might lose it.

You might not be able to save enough to cover the whole time you'll be out of work, but even a small amount can reduce your stress.

When you start thinking about saving, Jesse Mecham, founder of the money management app YNAB, recommends that you ask yourself this question: What do I want my money to do?

Maybe a year ago, you wanted to save for a large trip abroad, while now you want to have money in case you are out of work for six months.

People "would have a very different answer now than they might have had a year ago when they thought that their job was extremely secure," Mecham said.

If you are aggressively paying off debt and it's affecting your ability to save, Mecham recommends slowing down payments. You should still make at least the minimum payment, but you might want to consider temporarily using any money you're been paying over that to build an extra cash cushion so you have money available should you need it. It's also crucial to avoid getting into further debt, Mecham said.

UPDATE YOUR RESUME

It's always a good idea to keep your resume up to date but, most importantly, keep it customizable for several jobs, said Scott Dobrosky, career trends expert for Indeed. You can do this by leaving space in

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your resume to include keywords that are specific to the job you are applying for.

Jobs might require slightly different skills if you are planning to stay in the same industry or completely different skills if you move to another field. If you keep your resume updated and customizable, it could make things easier when you need to move on.

Anna Gallo, 33, a tech worker from Middletown, Connecticut, who was recently laid off, found updating her resume was more emotional than she expected.

"Updating my resume after not looking at it since I got my job was surprisingly sad. I had to take time and respect that sadness and wait until I was feeling better so I could do it," Gallo said.

Gallo now recommends keeping your resume updated even if you don't expect to be looking for work soon.

ACTIVATE YOUR NETWORK

Tapping into connections in your industry now is a good idea, said career coach Marlo Lyons. Talking with your friends about possible job openings elsewhere could give you a head start.

UPSKILL

Gaining new skills and adding certifications or courses to your resume can be a good way to move up in your current job. If you think you might have to go somewhere else, look for the skills that will make you a stronger candidate, Lyons said. Whether it's taking a free online course or signing up to get a specific license, upskilling your resume will have positive impacts whether you stay in your current job or have to look for another one.

Popular course websites include Coursera and edX, which offer courses and certifications from universities around the country. They offer some of the courses for free.

IF YOU HAVE BEEN LAID OFF

PRIORITIZE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Your mental health can be heavily affected after a job loss. Take a breath and let yourself feel the emotions. Prioritizing your mental health will allow you to approach your job search in a better way, Dobrosky said.

For Gallo, putting her mental health first meant that she gave herself a couple of days to feel sad.

"I think everybody needs that time after losing a job. I'm feeling better, even though I'm still extremely disappointed that this is how things turned out," Gallo said.

MAINTAIN A ROUTINE

Keeping some structure in your day will help you with your mental health and with the right cadence of applying to jobs, Mecham said.

Planning your days so they include eating at your usual time, working out or going for a walk and applying for jobs for a certain amount of hours will keep you grounded, he said. Lyons recommends designating a time during the day to start and end applying for jobs.

"Do not over-exhaust yourself with applying to jobs," Lyons said. "Take time to do activities that make you feel good."

For Gallo, this has meant getting up, making breakfast, taking a long shower and using her fancy soap, and after her usual work hours, going for walks and still hanging out with her friends.

"I'm trying to not let the fact that I'm not working from nine to five, change what I'm doing with the rest of my day too much," she said.

CHECK YOUR BENEFITS

It's crucial that you understand your compensation package and save any documentation that you need to understand your benefits after you've been laid off. Some especially important things to know are your health insurance and dental benefits, Dobrosky said.

NETWORK

Reaching out to your professional and personal network can be helpful, and it's useful to give some direction to friends and colleagues who want to help, Lyons said.

Examples include asking them to write you recommendations on LinkedIn, recommend you for a job or

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invite you to a conference for free.

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

It can be hard to talk about losing your job, and you should only share if you feel comfortable. But sharing can benefit you by allowing you to lean on your support system.

When Gallo shared on social media that she had lost her job, she did it mostly so everyone she knew would find out at the same time. She didn't expect hundreds of people, some who she knew and some who she didn't, to reach out offering to help.

"I felt like I was taking the power away from the secret that I had lost my job," she said. "I found it helpful to do a mass disclosure and also ask for help at that moment."

Gallo said she felt less isolated since she received encouraging messages and spoke with people with similar experiences.

APPLY FOR UNEMPLOYMENT

Applying for unemployment is an option that everyone should utilize, Lyons said. While the amount you get for unemployment might not be as much as your salary, it can help you to stay afloat for some time.

"You've been paying into it your entire life, get some of that money back," Lyons said. "Don't be shy about it."

You can learn more about how to apply for unemployment here.

CONSIDER A TEMPORARY JOB

A temporary job is a good option if you can't afford to be out of work, Dobrosky said. Lyons also recommends temporary jobs and says you should include them in your resume if they showcase skills that match your desired full-time job, such as leadership or organizational skills.

"It shows that you have grit, that you're willing to work hard and take care of your responsibilities," she said.

Kansas star Jalen Wilson named AP Big 12 player of the year

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Sports Writer

Big 12 scoring and rebounding leader Jalen Wilson of Kansas is the unanimous pick as The Associated Press Big 12 player of the year.

Kansas State senior forward Keyontae Johnson joined Wilson as the only unanimous first-team picks in the selections revealed Tuesday. Johnson, a transfer from Florida who has turned into a top player after a frightening collapse more than two years ago, was also selected as newcomer of the year in voting by a panel of 17 journalists who cover the league.

First-year Kansas State coach Jerome Tang was voted as coach of the year. After 19 seasons as an assistant for coach Scott Drew at Baylor, including the national championship two years ago, Tang directed the Wildcats to a 23-8 record in the regular season and third place in the Big 12 standings after being picked to finish last in a preseason poll of league coaches.

Wilson, a 6-foot-8 junior forward, goes into this week's Big 12 tournament leading the league with 19.7 points and 8.4 rebounds per game. The 6-6 Johnson averages 17.8 points and 7.0 rebounds.

Texas graduate guard Marcus Carr, Baylor senior guard Adam Flagler and K-State junior guard Markquis Nowell round out the first-team picks. The 5-8 Nowell is the Big 12's top free-throw shooter (88.5%), and also leads the league with 7.7 assists and 2.5 steals a game.

The second-team picks are senior Damion Baugh and junior Mike Miles Jr. from TCU, along with Kansas freshman guard Gradey Dick, Baylor freshman guard Keyonte George and Kansas senior guard Kevin McCullar Jr., a transfer from Texas Tech.

Johnson got 13 of the 17 votes for newcomer of the year, while Baylor's George got the other four.

Tang was the overwhelming choice for top coach with 15 votes. The remaining two votes went to Texas interim coach Rodney Terry, who led the Longhorns to a second-place finish in the Big 12 following the December dismissal and eventual firing of Chris Beard.

FIRST TEAM

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u-Keyontae Johnson, Kansas State, 6-6, 230, Sr., Norfolk, Virginia.

u-Jalen Wilson, Kansas, 6-8, 225, Jr., Denton, Texas.

Marcus Carr, Texas, 6-2, 175, Gr., Toronto.

Adam Flagler, Baylor, 6-3, 185, Sr., Duluth, Georgia.

Markquis Nowell, Kansas State, 5-8, 160, Sr./Jr., New York.

—"u—" denotes unanimous selection.

SECOND TEAM

Damion Baugh, TCU, 6-4, 195, Sr., Nashville, Tennessee.

Gradey Dick, Kansas 6-8, 205, Fr., Wichita, Kansas.

Keyonte George, Baylor, 6-4, 185, Fr., Lewisville, Texas.

Kevin McCullar Jr., Kansas, 6-6, 210, Sr., San Antonio.

Mike Miles Jr., TCU, 6-2, 195, Jr., Dallas.

Coach of the year — Jerome Tang, Kansas State

Player of the year — Jalen Wilson, Kansas.

Newcomer of the year — Keyontae Johnson, Kansas State.

AP All-Big 12 Voting Panel: Chuck Carlton, Dallas Morning News; Arne Green, Salina Journal; Jordan Guskey, Topeka Capital-Journal; Justin Jackson, The Dominion Post; Steven Johnson, Fort Worth Star-Telegram; Thomas Jones, Austin American-Statesman; Eric Kelly, KWKT-TV, Waco, Texas; Eli Lederman, Tulsa World; Justin Martinez, The Oklahoman; Jared MacDonald, Charleston Gazette-Mail; Randy Peterson, Des Moines Register; Kellis Robinett, Wichita Eagle; Dean Ruhl, Tulsa World; Carlos Silva Jr., Lubbock Avalanche-Journal; Matt Tait, Lawrence Journal-World; Jacob Unruh, The Oklahoman; John Werner, Waco Tribune-Herald.

Analysis: Giannis loses triple-double amid stat padding talk

By PAT GRAHAM AP Sports Writer

DENVER (AP) — Sorry, Giannis, the NBA wanted back that rebound. Your fourth triple-double of the season, too.

Some might say nice try, others have an issue with what is known as stat padding.

When Milwaukee MVP candidate Giannis Antetokounmpo tried to orchestrate his 10th rebound Sunday night in the final seconds of the Bucks' win against Washington, it sent the world of social media into overdrive.

Along with it, dredged up conversations about the touchy topic of stat padding, which insinuates that someone, whether it be on the basketball court or even in the world of online video games, compiles results oblivious to what's going on around them.

A rebound shy of the triple-double mark, Antetokounmpo was running out the clock when he stopped near the basket. He hesitated for a moment before lightly tossing the ball at the bottom of the rim and grabbing it for what appeared to be his 10th board.

Even the announcer was like, "Does that count?"

It did — until it didn't. On Monday, and following a review by the league, his official line read: 23 points, 13 assists and nine boards.

While wiping away Antetokounmpo's last rebound was probably an easy call for the league, it sometimes can be a fine line between padding one's stats and just playing the game hard. Russell Westbrook no doubt heard the innuendos when he was a triple-double machine. Two-time reigning NBA MVP Nikola Jokic recently heard aspersions, too.

Antetokounmpo's rebound was on the blatant side (his name got added to a Wikipedia entry on "stat padding").

"I just try to play the game smart and kind of stole one," Antetokounmpo said in a postgame interview following a 117-111 win over Washington.

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Nuggets coach Michael Malone doesn't believe Jokic would ever try to steal one. Still, Jokic heard the noise directed his way after recording his 100th career triple-double on Feb. 28. The Denver big man sarcastically addressed comments made by ESPN NBA analyst Kendrick Perkins, who intimated Jokic was guilty of stat padding.

"I mean, when you're stat padding it's easy, you know," Jokic told the Nuggets' TV network Altitude Sports of notching the milestone.

Asked if he heard the chatter, Jokic amusingly responded: "Yes, of course. I mean, it's true."

Concerning the late-game actions of Antetokounmpo, Perkins commented on Twitter: "Every player has padded their stats at some point during their career."

Players in triple-double territory do often know when they're closing in on the usually impressive stat line. Some even know exactly what's required. They know when they need one rebound or one assist, and so do their teammates. They almost always defer in those moments for the benefit of someone else's stats.

Teams get stat sheets delivered in every time-out. Scoreboards in the arenas show every number imaginable. Everybody knows the deal in those moments.

There have been memorable, and strange, examples of the lengths players will go to get there. Cleveland's Ricky Davis shot at the wrong basket in 2003 to try and get the one rebound he needed; it wasn't awarded by the stat crew and Utah was highly annoyed at Davis' antics with 6 seconds left in what was a 25-point game.

"He was trying to embarrass somebody. ... I'd have knocked him on his" butt, the late Jerry Sloan, then the Utah coach, said that night.

When the obvious doesn't happen, stat padding tends to become hilarious.

Take the game in 2017, when Dwyane Wade was with the Chicago Bulls and needed one rebound for a triple-double. Kay Felder took the game's final shot for Cleveland, it missed and the ball was magically coming right to where Wade was standing with 1 second remaining — that is, until Bulls teammate Cristiano Felicio knocked the ball away.

Wade fell back in disbelief, then gave Felicio a look as if to ask, "Why?"

"My teammate didn't want me to be great," Wade said that night, smiling, though mildly bothered.

Wade did just fine without that triple-double; he's almost certainly going into the Basketball Hall of Fame later this year. Andray Blatche, however, is not going to be enshrined in Springfield. He never got a triple-double. He almost did, once.

April 4, 2010, was the night of Blatche infamy. He finished with 20 points, 13 assists and nine rebounds for Washington, and thought he had rebound No. 10 with 22.1 seconds left. Small complication: He fouled New Jersey's Brook Lopez on the play, and didn't have another chance to get the board he needed.

In the case of Jokic, Malone doesn't believe his center would ever chase individual glory — though the Nuggets' coach has a theory why someone might.

"Maybe they're just tired of this player, non-athletic player from Sombor, Serbia, continuing to kick everybody's" butt, Malone told reporters after a recent practice. "Maybe people have a hard time with that. I don't know. But for (Jokic) to say that, 'Yeah, you know what, I'm padding my stats.' Yeah, it probably signals that maybe something touched a nerve.

"He's not doing anything to pump his own numbers up," Malone added. "It's just not in his nature. It's silly to think otherwise."

What we know about the 4 Americans kidnapped in Mexico

By ALFREDO PEÑA and MATTHEW BARAKAT Associated Press

CIUDAD VICTORIA, Mexico (AP) — Four Americans who traveled to Mexico last week to seek health care got caught in a deadly shootout and were kidnapped by heavily armed men who threw them in the back of a pickup truck, officials from both countries said Monday.

The four were traveling Friday in a white minivan with North Carolina license plates. They came under fire shortly after entering the city of Matamoros from Brownsville, at the southernmost tip of Texas near

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the Gulf coast, the FBI said in a statement Sunday.

"All four Americans were placed in a vehicle and taken from the scene by armed men," the FBI said. The bureau is offering a \$50,000 reward for the victims' return and the arrest of the kidnappers.

Zalandria Brown of Florence, South Carolina, said she has been in contact with the FBI and local officials after learning that her younger brother, Zindell Brown, is one of the four victims.

"This is like a bad dream you wish you could wake up from," she said in a phone interview. "To see a member of your family thrown in the back of a truck and dragged, it is just unbelievable."

Zalandria Brown said her brother, who lives in Myrtle Beach, and two friends had accompanied a third friend who was going to Mexico for a tummy tuck surgery. A doctor who advertises such surgeries in Matamoros did not answer calls seeking comment.

Brown said the group was extremely close and they all made the trip in part to help split up the driving duties. They were aware of the dangers in Mexico, she added, and her brother had expressed some misgivings.

"Zindell kept saying, 'We shouldn't go down,'" Brown said.

A video posted to social media Friday showed men with assault rifles and tan body armor loading the four people into the bed of a white pickup in broad daylight. One was alive and sitting up, but the others seemed either dead or wounded. At least one person appeared to lift his head from the pavement before being dragged to the truck.

The scene illustrates the terror that has prevailed for years in Matamoros, a city dominated by factions of the powerful Gulf drug cartel who often fight among themselves. Amid the violence, thousands of Mexicans have disappeared in Tamaulipas state alone.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Monday that "there was a confrontation between groups, and they were detained," without offering details. He originally said the four Americans came to Mexico to buy medications.

Tamaulipas' chief prosecutor, Irving Barrios, told reporters that a Mexican woman died in Friday's shootings. He did not specify whether she was killed in the same gunfight where the kidnapping took place.

A woman driving in Matamoros who asked not to be identified for fear of reprisal said she witnessed what appeared to be the shooting and abduction.

The white minivan was hit by another vehicle near an intersection, then gunfire rang out, the woman said. Another SUV rolled up, and several armed men hopped out.

"All of a sudden they (the gunmen) were in front of us," she said. "I entered a state of shock, nobody honked their horn, nobody moved. Everybody must have been thinking the same thing, 'If we move they will see us, or they might shoot us.'"

She said the gunmen forced a woman, who was able to walk, into the back of a pickup. Another person was carried to the truck but could still move his head.

"The other two they dragged across the pavement, we don't know if they were alive or dead," she said.

Mexican authorities arrived minutes later.

Zindell Brown's family asked people to share any relevant information with local authorities. O'dell William Brown, his father, said the family is still searching for answers.

"I don't know which way to go right now," he said. "We don't know what's what."

Shootouts in Matamoros were so bad on Friday that the U.S. Consulate issued an alert about the danger and local authorities warned people to shelter in place. It was not immediately clear how the abductions may have been connected to that violence.

U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar said in a statement Monday the Americans were kidnapped at gunpoint and an "innocent" Mexican citizen died in the attack. He said various U.S. justice agencies were working with their Mexican counterparts to recover the missing persons.

Authorities have provided no other details about the victims.

President Joe Biden had been informed of the situation, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Monday. She declined to answer other questions, citing privacy concerns.

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Victims of violence in Matamoros and other large border cities of Tamaulipas often go uncounted because the cartels have a history taking bodies of their own with them. Local media often avoid reporting on such episodes out of safety concerns, creating an information vacuum.

The State Department warns U.S. citizens not to travel to Tamaulipas. However U.S. citizens who live in Brownsville or elsewhere in Texas frequently cross to visit family, attend medical appointments or shop. It's also a crossing point for people traveling deeper into Mexico.

As the headquarters of the Gulf cartel, Matamoros was once relatively calm. For years, a night out in the city was part of the "two-nation vacation" for spring breakers flocking to Texas' South Padre Island.

But increased cartel violence over the past 10 to 15 years frightened away much of that business. Sometimes U.S. citizens are swept up in the fighting.

Three U.S. siblings disappeared near Matamoros in October 2014 while visiting their father and were later found shot to death and burned. Their parents said they had been abducted by men dressed in police gear identifying themselves as "Hercules," a tactical security unit in the city.

Taylor Swift, Pink to be honored at 2023 iHeartRadio Awards

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Taylor Swift will receive the 2023 iHeartRadio Innovator Award at the iHeartRadio Music Awards later this month, which will feature performances by Kelly Clarkson, Keith Urban, Pat Benatar, Muni Long, Cody Johnson, Coldplay and Pink, who is this year's Icon Award recipient.

The Innovator Award is presented to an artist who has "impacted global pop culture throughout their career." Past recipients include Pharrell Williams, Justin Timberlake, U2 and Alicia Keys.

Pink will receive the Icon Award honoring her "impact on pop culture, longevity and continued relevance as a touring and radio force with a loyal fan base worldwide."

The iHeartRadio Music Awards will be aired March 27 on Fox from the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles and aired on iHeartRadio stations and the app.

Lizzo, Swift and Harry Styles lead the awards nominations with seven nods each, and Jack Harlow and Drake are close behind with six each.

For top song of the year, Lizzo's "About Damn Time" faces off against Swift's "Anti-Hero," Styles' "As It Was," Justin Bieber's "Ghost," Doja Cat's "Woman," Glass Animals' "Heat Wave," Latto's "Big Energy," Lil Nas X & Jack Harlow's "Industry Baby," Harlow's "First Class," and Imagine Dragons' "Enemy."

Fans can vote in several categories including best fan army, best lyrics, best cover song, best sample and best music video. Voting on Twitter begins Wednesday using the appropriate category and nominee hashtags and will close March 20.

With five nominations each are Doja Cat, Beyoncé, Dua Lipa, Tems, Bad Bunny and Red Hot Chili Peppers. Silk Sonic, Future, Latto, Imagine Dragons, The Weeknd, BLACKPINK, Karol G and Nicki Minaj have four each.

Artist of the year pits Beyoncé against Doja Cat, Drake, Dua Lipa, Styles, Harlow, Bieber, Lizzo, Swift and The Weeknd for the crown. Best duo or group nominees are AJR, Black Eyed Peas, BLACKPINK, Silk Sonic, Glass Animals, Imagine Dragons, Måneskin, OneRepublic, Parmalee and Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Country artist of the year nominees are Carrie Underwood, Jason Aldean, Kane Brown, Luke Combs and Morgan Wallen. Hip-hop artist of the year nominees are Drake, Future, Kodak Black, Lil Baby and Moneybagg Yo.

Nominees for alternative artist of the year are Imagine Dragons, Måneskin, Twenty One Pilots, Weezer and Red Hot Chili Peppers, the last of whom also are on the list of rock artists of the year, along with Ghost, Papa Roach, Shinedown and Three Days Grace.

The Latin pop/reggaeton artist of the year nominees are Bad Bunny, Daddy Yankee, Farruko, Karol G and Rauw Alejandro. And nominees for best R&B artist are Blxst, Bleu, Silk Sonic, Muni Long and SZA.

Roman shrine uncovered beneath graveyard in central England

LONDON (AP) — Archaeologists have uncovered what they believe to be a Roman shrine beneath a former graveyard in the grounds of a cathedral in central England.

Experts from the University of Leicester said Tuesday that they found what appears to be the cellar of a Roman building and a fragment of a 1,800-year-old altar stone during excavations in the grounds of Leicester Cathedral.

“There’s always been this folk tale that there was a Roman temple underneath the cathedral,” said Mathew Morris, excavation director for the University of Leicester’s Archaeological Services.

“Until now, there’s been no way of being able to say whether there was or not,” he added, but the new findings reveal that “there is definitely a Roman place of worship underneath the cathedral.”

Morris and his team believe the cellar, nearly 10 feet (3 meters) below the ground, was built in the second century. Several pieces of Roman pottery and coins were also found at the site.

The Romans built a fort around A.D. 50 in Leicester, a settlement known as Ratae Corieltavorum.

The dig was part of a multi-million-pound project to restore Leicester Cathedral, thought to have first been built in the 11th century. The cathedral is now home to the tomb of Richard III, England’s last Plantagenet king and the last English monarch to have died in battle. He died in 1485.

The University of Leicester’s archaeological team found the medieval king’s remains a decade ago in a Leicester city center parking lot. He was reinterred in the cathedral in 2015.

Russian activist gets prison sentence for Ukraine posts

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — A court in Moscow sentenced a student activist to 8 1/2 years in prison for social media posts criticizing Russia’s war in Ukraine, the latest step in a sweeping crackdown on dissent unleashed by the Kremlin.

Dmitry Ivanov, 23, was convicted of spreading false information about the Russian army, which was made a criminal offense under a new law that Russian lawmakers rubber-stamped a week after Moscow sent troops into Ukraine.

The legislation has been used to prosecute individuals who deviate from the government’s official narrative of the conflict that the Kremlin insists on calling “a special military operation.”

Prominent opposition politicians, such as Ilya Yashin, who is serving an 8 1/2 prison term, and Vladimir Kara-Murza, who is in jail awaiting trial, also were charged with spreading false information about the military.

Ivanov was charged over a number of social media posts in his Telegram channel that called Russia’s campaign in Ukraine a “war” and talked about Russian forces attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, committing war crimes in the Kyiv suburbs of Bucha and Irpin, and targeting the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Most were reposts from other sources.

At the time of his April 2022 arrest, Ivanov was a student at Lomonosov Moscow State University, one of Russia’s top universities also known as the MSU. He ran a popular Telegram channel called Protest MSU, which was launched in 2018 to cover student protests against the construction next to the university’s main building of a fan zone for the Russia-hosted World Cup soccer tournament.

Ivanov initially was jailed for 10 days on the charge of organizing an unauthorized rally. Authorities jailed him again on the same charge for 25 days, and then he was arrested over the social media posts.

While in custody, the student missed his final exams and failed to submit his final dissertation. He was expelled from the university.

During Ivanov’s trial, in an unusual twist the court approved a defense request to subpoena Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov and Russia’s ambassador to the U.N., Vasily Nebenzya.

Ivanov’s lawyers argued that since the authorities had used the officials’ statements to prove that Ivanov’s social media posts contained false information, they should be deposed in court.

However, neither of the three complied with the subpoenas to appear in court.

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In his final address to the court last week, Ivanov rejected the charges against him as "looking absurd" and said the crime he was prosecuted for "shouldn't exist at all."

"The investigation, in trying to accuse me of spreading 'fakes,' has built one big fake (itself). Literally the entire indictment, from the first to the very last word, contradicts the reality," Ivanov said. "I, in the meantime, stand by every word I wrote a year ago."

Today in History: MARCH 8, Joe Frazier defeats Muhammad Ali

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, March 8, the 67th day of 2023. There are 298 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history:

On March 8, 1965, the United States landed its first combat troops in South Vietnam as 3,500 Marines arrived to defend the U.S. air base at Da Nang.

On this date:

In 1618, German astronomer Johannes Kepler devised his third law of planetary motion.

In 1817, the New York Stock & Exchange Board, which had its beginnings in 1792, was formally organized; it later became known as the New York Stock Exchange.

In 1948, the Supreme Court, in *McCollum v. Board of Education*, struck down voluntary religious education classes in Champaign, Illinois, public schools, saying the program violated separation of church and state.

In 1971, Joe Frazier defeated Muhammad Ali by decision in what was billed as "The Fight of the Century" at Madison Square Garden in New York. Silent film comedian Harold Lloyd died in Beverly Hills, California, at age 77.

In 1983, in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals convention in Orlando, Florida, President Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire."

In 1988, 17 soldiers were killed when two Army helicopters from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, collided in mid-flight.

In 1999, baseball Hall of Famer Joe DiMaggio died in Hollywood, Florida, at age 84.

In 2000, President Bill Clinton submitted to Congress legislation to establish permanent normal trade relations with China. (The U.S. and China signed a trade pact in November 2000.)

In 2004, Iraq's Governing Council signed a landmark interim constitution.

In 2008, President George W. Bush vetoed a bill that would have banned the CIA from using simulated drowning and other coercive interrogation methods to gain information from suspected terrorists.

In 2014, Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, a Boeing 777 with 239 people on board, vanished during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, setting off a massive and ultimately unsuccessful search.

In 2016, Sir George Martin, the Beatles' urbane producer who guided the band's swift, historic transformation from rowdy club act to musical and cultural revolutionaries, died at age 90.

Ten years ago: The government reported the jobless rate dropped to 7.7 percent the previous month, the lowest level since President Barack Obama took office. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel arrived in Afghanistan for his first visit as Pentagon chief. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was lauded at his state funeral as a modern-day reincarnation of Latin American liberator Simon Bolivar and a disciple of Cuba's Fidel Castro.

Five years ago: U.S. and South Korean officials said President Donald Trump had agreed to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jung Un by the end of May to negotiate an end to North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Mississippi lawmakers passed one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the nation, making the procedure illegal in most cases after 15 weeks of pregnancy; a federal judge later struck down the law as unconstitutional. Serena Williams beat Zarina Diyas of Kazakhstan, 7-5, 6-3, in the first round of a tournament in Indian Wells, California; it was Williams' first match following a 14-month layoff for the birth of her daughter.

One year ago: President Joe Biden announced that the U.S. would ban all Russian oil imports, toughen-

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ing the toll on Russia's economy in retaliation for its invasion of Ukraine as a humanitarian crisis unfolded in the port city of Mariupol. Guy Wesley Reffitt of Texas was convicted of storming the U.S. Capitol with a holstered handgun, a milestone victory for federal prosecutors in the first trial among hundreds of cases arising from the Jan. 6 riots.

Today's birthdays: Jazz musician George Coleman is 88. Actor Sue Ane (correct) Langdon is 87. College Football Hall of Famer Pete Dawkins is 85. Songwriter Carole Bayer Sager is 79. Actor-director Micky Dolenz (The Monkees) is 78. Singer-musician Randy Meisner is 77. Pop singer Peggy March is 75. Baseball Hall of Famer Jim Rice is 70. Jazz musician Billy Childs is 66. Singer Gary Numan is 65. NBC News anchor Lester Holt is 64. Actor Aidan Quinn is 64. Actor Camryn Manheim is 62. Actor Leon (no last name) is 62. Country-rock singer Shawn Mullins is 55. Neo-soul singer Van Hunt is 53. Actor Andrea Parker is 53. Actor Boris Kodjoe is 50. Actor Freddie Prinze Jr. is 47. Actor Laura Main is 46. Actor James Van Der Beek is 46. R&B singer Kameelah Williams (702) is 45. Actor Nick Zano is 45. Rock singer Tom Chaplin (Keane) is 44. Rock musician Andy Ross (OK Go) is 44. Actor Jessica Collins is 40. R&B singer Kristinia (kris-teh-NEE'-ah) DeBarge is 33.